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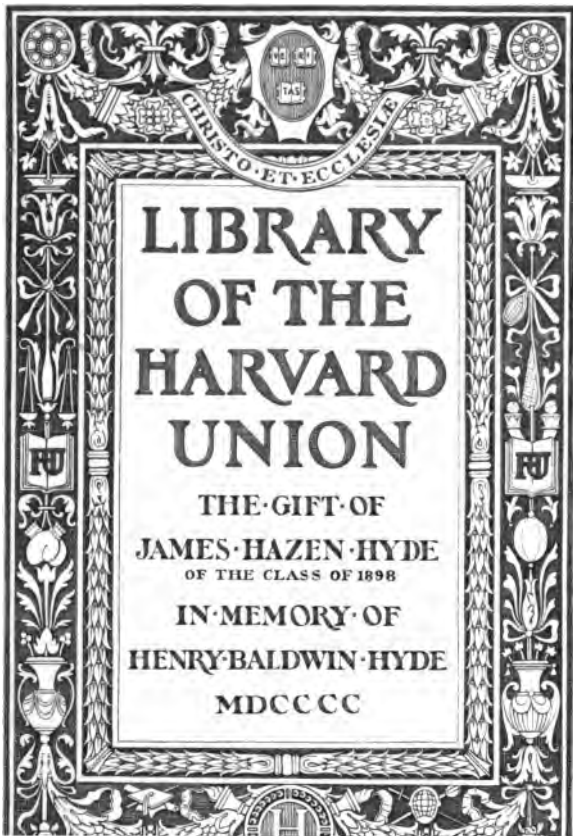
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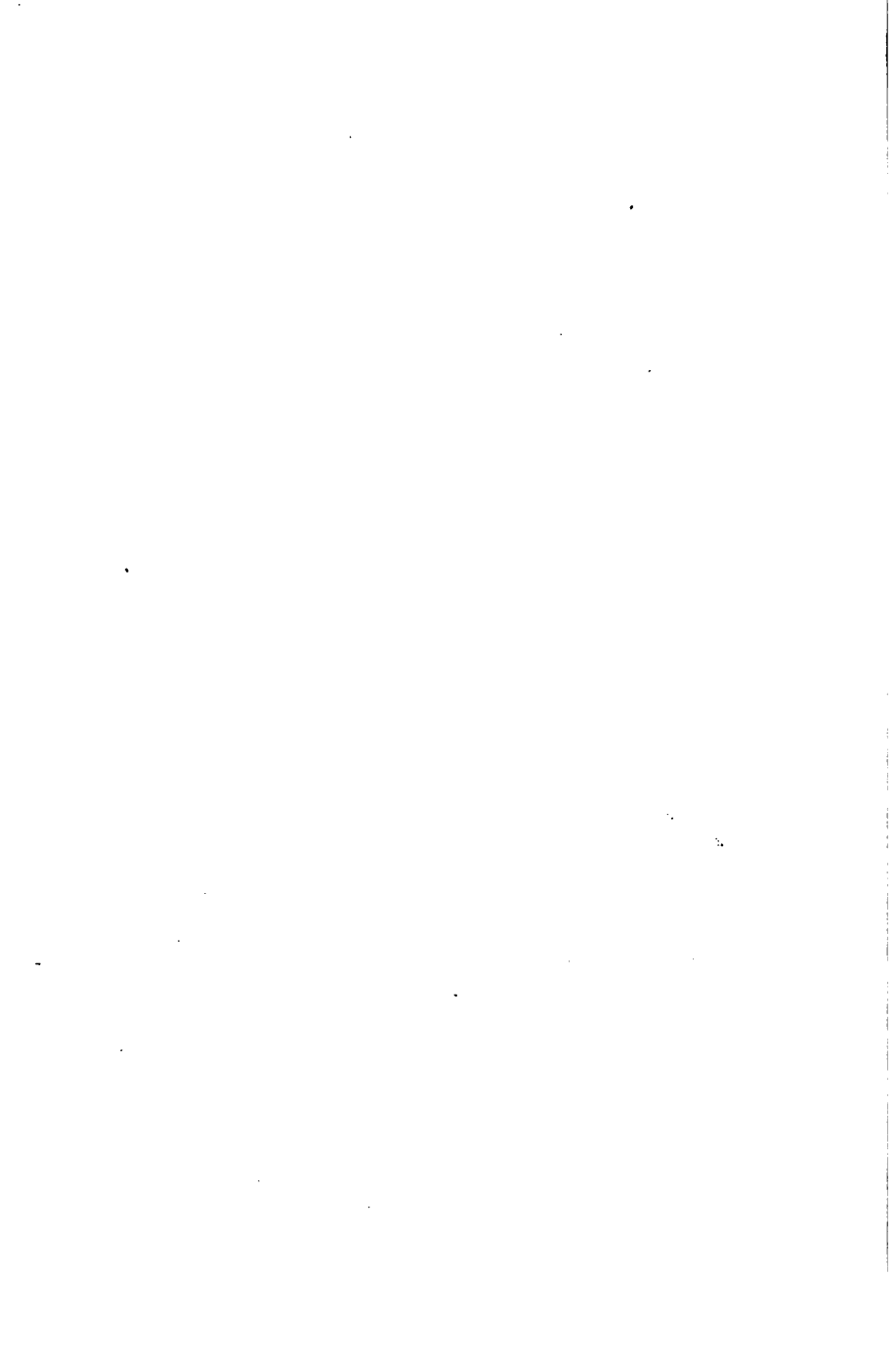
IN THE GARDEN
OF CHARITY

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IN THE
GARDEN OF CHARITY

BY

BASIL KING

AUTHOR OF "LET NOT MAN PUT ASUNDER"



5869

NEW YORK AND LONDON
HARPER & BROTHERS
PUBLISHERS 1903

Can 9765.1.30
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Published February, 1903.

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TO
MY WIFE
WITH EVER-INCREASING LOVE

5869



In the Garden of Charity

I

IT had been an August storm, windy and warm. The fishermen were in the habit of expecting it about the middle of the month; and when it had come and gone they said that "the back of the summer was broken." The fishermen's wives felt some of their anxiety lightened if the weeks that followed brought no bad news from "the Banks." To-day the sun was out again; and though the Atlantic was still heaving with a long, sullen swell, there were no white-caps on its bosom nor breakers on the shore. Wind and sea were going down. The last of the clouds that had brought the tempest were dragging themselves off to the northeast, towards Cape Breton and Newfoundland. The women coming out of their cottages to see what harm had been done by the gale, and the lads going down to the "skids" to bale out the half-filled boats, were conscious of an exhilaration in the air, as though they had struggled with a foe and conquered it.

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From Charity Pennland's garden, at the top of the hill, there was a certain wild splendor in the landscape. East and west the irregular Nova - Scotian coast could be seen for many miles—a long, broken line of headland and bay, headland and bay, following each other in picturesque monotony. A group of jagged rocks rose, sharp and menacing, off Needle Point; while a chain of barren islands, against which the waves threw up big splashes of spray, lay like outworks put forth by the land against the ocean. All along the indented coast the Atlantic marked the limits of its domain in a finely traced edge of curling white.

Inland, nature had been left to herself almost as completely as out upon the deep. She had been so sparing of her gifts that what she had given seemed of no use at all. She had, indeed, clothed the wind-swept hills, but only with her hardy family of heaths—the blueberry, the huckleberry, and whatever else there is in plant-life that can eke out an existence almost without food. Now that their unobtrusive flowers had passed into fruit, and the fruit had been gathered by the children who had scrambled up from Fisher's Grant, these brave little starvelings of nature were doing a further favor to mankind by arraying themselves for the restful time of life in russet, yellow, and crimson, and all the unnamed hues of sunset. Here and there the eye rested with pleasure

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on a dwarfed pine or a slender, white-limbed birch-tree; while at intervals a stunted maple heralded the approach of autumn by putting forth a red leaf like a flower. As far as the vision could reach there was nothing but this richly colored desolation. As Wise Willum Boutilier used to say:

“God didn’t mean this bit of shore for no one but the sea-gulls and the pa’ttridges. The human crittur must seek his bread upon the waters when alive; and when he’s dead he can’t get earth enough to cover him.”

And yet Wise Willum, with the rest of his kith and kin, could never have supported life elsewhere. It was not that they cared consciously for their stretch of granite hill-side; but they belonged to it, and it to them. Its meagre nourishment was sufficient for their meagre needs. Like sea-birds, they asked of the dry land nothing but a nesting-place, when wind or weather drove them “in-shore.” Even then they built their houses close to the water’s edge, so that between one phase of their existence and the other the transition might be as slight as possible.

Looking down from Charity Pennland’s garden one could see the village of Fisher’s Grant nestling, like Clovelly, in a great cleft of the rocky shore. At a distance its white cottages resembled the scriptural swine, running violently down a steep place to where the Atlantic thrust a long, blue, fiordlike finger between

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the heath-covered hills. Into this narrow bay three or four coasting schooners had run for shelter from yesterday's storm; but now that morning had brought smoother seas, and only a pleasantly stiff breeze, all were preparing to sail out again. One was already rounding Needle Point and bearing to the westward.

"That's Jacob Eisenhauer's *Leviathan*," Charity Pennland said to herself as she looked at it through her father's spy-glass. "He've come down Guysborough way, and is making for Shelburne. Well, William can't ha' been aboard, or he'd ha' been here by now."

She remembered afterwards that she had made this observation, and during all the rest of her life she thought it strange.

"He can't ha' come on any of 'em," she continued, as she turned her glass on one after another of the schooners still lying in the harbor. "Well, God knows best. William 'll come in the fulness of time, and by the way appointed to his feet. But he'll come," she added, with conviction. "Nobody needn't tell me any different from that."

She folded her spy-glass and laid it on a bench by the cottage door. Advancing into her garden, she looked about her with some dismay. The hollyhocks were bowed by the violence of last night's wind, and the phlox and verbenas had been beaten by the rain into disordered masses of blossom.

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“Mercy me!” she sighed. “It ’ll be a all-day’s job to get things straight again. And if William should come of a sudden and see the place like this I’d never get over it. And I can’t help a feelin’ that he *may* come. I dreamt last night of bread burning in the oven, and they say that’s always a sign of a stranger. Well, William wouldn’t be no stranger, when I’ve watched and waited for eleven years. Dear, dear! There’s that pink hollyhock I set so much store by right down in the dirt, like a person in a fit.”

She hurried into the cottage and drew on a pair of stout, old, gardening gloves; then, coming out, she began to busy herself with the task of bringing order among the storm-tossed flowers.

The fact that Charity’s dwelling stood on the hill above the village—holding itself aloof with simple dignity—would have made clear to any observant person her social superiority at Fisher’s Grant. She was above the level of her neighbors, and the garden surrounded her with a kind of state. It was the only garden along that stretch of coast; and tales were told of it, by sailors who had seen it, not less wonderful than those that the classic mariner brought back from the golden - apple orchards of the Hesperides. Out in a dory, “on the Banks,” in the fog and the cold, miles away from the schooner, and in danger every minute of being ploughed down by some huge liner, it was pleasant to remember this bright spot

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near home—with its tall, grave monk's-hood and light-blue larkspur and sweet-williams and sweet-peas and nasturtiums of every shade of sunshine climbing over the low stone walls. Neither Joel nor Amos nor Sam could have given you the names of these Old World flowers; but they would have told you that they liked "red and yaller posies"; and, had they been able to express themselves, they would have owned to an indefinable appreciation of the woman who grew them and lived among them, herself suggestive of some pretty thing in bloom. For them Charity Pennland was a being apart—one who had little in common with themselves and their hard-working, broad-featured wives. They were only fisher people; while her father—old Cap'n Byfleet—had been master of his own trading schooner. They were dependent on the most uncertain of all trades, while she lived on "money in the bank." They were satisfied with keeping body and soul together; while she had passed through the romance of marrying a soldier, who might any day return from "foreign parts." *Prima inter pares* would have stated Charity's position at Fisher's Grant as aptly as it defines the place of the Archbishop of Canterbury among the prelates of his church.

Another circumstance counted for more than any one supposed. Fisher's Grant was a Boutillier village; every inhabitant bore the name, except in those

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cases where some matrimonial accident had brought in a Schlagenweit or Jolimœurs.

Charity, on the other hand, was of that old, strong New England stock for whom the first of all things is duty. The Byfleets—"my father's kin," as she was accustomed to call them, with the slightest possible emphasis of pride—had been Austerfield people, and neighbors of the Bradfords. They were well-to-do farmers, who had ploughed their own land from the days of the early Tudors. They had never been remarkable for anything beyond a certain high-minded honesty that had brought them respect throughout all Basset Lawe. They were quiet folk, with little ambition except to live righteously and die well; but when the Spirit breathed on them, and the call came, they were ready. They did not sail in the *Mayflower*, but they followed in the *Anne*; and into the life of the New World they transmitted, during five generations, those qualities of godliness and strength stored up during the tranquil centuries on the English farm.

But in the sixth generation there came another call. The instinct to rise up and go at the command of duty was still the first in the Byfleet blood. When the yeomen and fishermen of the Old Colony armed themselves to assert their ancient Saxon rights, the Byfleets were for submission and the king. Arguments, threats, and entreaties were alike unavailing with a race that had already proved its ability to re-

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sist to the uttermost such appeals when the question was one of principle. There came a day when Standish and Charity Byfleet, with their family of little ones, said farewell to the pleasant homestead on the Duxbury shore, and looked their last on Hither and Further Manomet. Out at sea, making for the northward, they gazed long at the summit of Burial Hill, where lay those of their ancestors who had done for what they believed in that which they themselves were doing now. There was grief in their hearts, but it was a proud grief—the grief that will suffer but shed no tear, nor yield an inch of what it fights for. Up in the north, beyond the limits of New England, they knew there was a thinly peopled land where the king was still owned as the Lord's anointed. Here many of their friends had already found a refuge; and here, too, at Shelburne, Standish and Charity Byfleet began their life all over again, as their ancestors did when they landed from the *Anne*.

But fortune, which had blessed the Byfleet honesty in Massachusetts Bay, was harder to win in Nova Scotia. It was less easy to carve out a new life at Shelburne than it had been at Duxbury. There was less heart, too, in the undertaking. The Byfleets were not pioneers, but refugees; they were the victims of a lost cause rather than the heralds of a winning one. These facts damped their energy from the start. The first generation to grow up on Acadian soil sank from

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the position their forefathers had held, and the second went a step lower. Among the scattered hamlets along the coast there were few churches and fewer schools. Old Cap'n Byfleet, Charity's father, had barely learned to read and write; and as years went by the very traditions of the family were forgotten. The old man did say, from time to time, that his people had come from "somewhere in the Boston States"; but all the long way that led through national convulsion and spiritual exaltation from the Austerfield farm to Fisher's Grant was blotted out. So it came to pass that Charity Pennland knew nothing of the rock whence she had been hewn. She, too, spoke sometimes of the "Boston States"; but only as of a land where there was an unlimited demand for fish and stout-limbed, strong-handed serving-maids.

But something transmitted from the past remained to the Byfleets—something that no changes of fortune nor social descent nor poverty of living could ever take away. That force of character which had made them God-fearing yeomen under Henry the Seventh—and numbered them among the elect under James the First and sent them forth as exiles under George the Third—was not yet spent when they had become simple fishermen and sailors.

"'Isaac, keep up,' my father used to tell me," Cap'n Byfleet liked to say in his old age. "And I kep' up," he would add, proudly.

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It was his way of translating the Byfleet ambition to respond to the higher call. It was an ambition that—in days when there were no William Brewsters to summon to lofty, rugged, spiritual ways—worked itself out in keeping clean, in saving money, in owning boats, in belonging to the cabin rather than the fo'castle, and in being in the van of what little civilization came their way.

When Isaac Byfleet married Mary Dauphiny, of Lunenburg, he was already the owner of the *Wild Duck*—that is to say, he was no longer young; he had worked hard and lived sparingly, and bought the schooner after years of stint. He would have been on the road to fortune, only that fortune is found but slowly in “following the sea” along a thinly settled coast where there is not much to buy or sell and almost nothing in the way of cargo.

Mary Dauphiny was a sailor's daughter, and as a bride thought it but natural that she should make her home with her husband on the *Wild Duck*. It was on a voyage from Shelburne to Halifax that the pangs of travail came upon her suddenly, and Cap'n Byfleet was forced to “put in” to Fisher's Grant. Here, in a small, white house at the top of the hill above the village, old “A'nt Ellen,” as she was called all along the shore, was living still. She was a wise woman, skilled in charms against all ordinary diseases, and was much in request on occasions of birth and death.

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In her house Charity Byfleet was born, and Mary Byfleet died. Isaac Byfleet took both events stoically. He carried the child to Shelburne to be brought up by a married sister, and resumed his former life. His wife had been young and pretty, but he never said to any one that he mourned her. Only, years afterwards, when age and infirmity compelled him to give up the sea, and his modest fortune enabled him to do so with dignity, he bought the cottage on the hill, which "A'nt Ellen's" death had rendered free.

"Good pity!" his married sister at Shelburne had exclaimed, when she heard his plan. "What in the name o' Peter are you goin' to shet yourself up in a place like Fisher's Grant for? And Charity only twelve!"

"I want to die where Mary died," was all the old man said; and no reasoning could move him.

Thus Charity came back to the house where she was born — a pretty, gray-eyed, fair-haired child, strangely in contrast with the dark-skinned Boutilier race around her.

"The Boutiliers," old Wise Willum Boutilier used to say, "once lived on the borders of France and Germany. The Schlageweits and Jolimœurs was their neighbors. They' was rich people, by what I've heard tell, and had their own boats, fishin' in the waters off them coasts. Howsomever, they was strict members of the Church of England. But the king o'

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the country put out a law to bring 'em all under the Pope. The Boutiliers wouldn't stand that, and so, with the Jolimœurs and Schlagenweits, they took ship and put out to sea. The first land they struck was the coast of Nova Scotia. The Jolimœurs got out at Mount Misery, and the Schlagenweits at Peggy's Cove, while the Boutiliers came along here and settled at Fisher's Grant."

This was all that tradition had handed down at Fisher's Grant of the revocation of the Edict of Nantes, and the sailing of a brave little band of Huguenots in the wake, so to speak, of the Pilgrim Fathers.

Acadia in those days still belonged to France; and the Boutiliers had hoped to find in their own king's realms beyond the sea the same sort of refuge as their English brethren, a generation or two before, had secured at Plymouth. But they were not a race to bear transplantation. Torn from their looms and their pastry-shops in the towns of eastern France, they felt themselves lost on the hard, bare coast whither they had drifted. They could not adapt themselves to the changed conditions, or find in their natures the energies to meet new needs. They clung to their rocky headlands only as the shipwrecked cling to the barren island on which they have been tossed. They were disappointed and discouraged. Their very faith was insufficient for the trials into

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which it had led them. In the first generation it began to fail; in the second it went out; in the third the English missionaries swept them all into a nominal connection with the English Church—christening their children and burying their dead and obliterating any lingering traces of the belief that had made them exiles. Like the Byfleets, the Boutiliers, too, lost sight of the winding way that had brought them to Fisher's Grant. They were there, and they did not question any further. They took to the sea because there was no other means of earning a livelihood. They would have been astonished to hear that there had ever been a time when their ancestors had been weavers and pastry-cooks, or other than members of the Church of England.

II

IN this way it happened that, while the Israel of Plymouth increased and became a great nation, in a land flowing with milk and honey, the Ishmael of Fisher's Grant dwindled to a few small tribes, seeking a precarious living on the waters.

Between the two stocks there were racial differences; and Charity Pennland, while ignorant of ethnical and all other problems, had an instinctive appreciation of the fact. Though she could not have told you why, she felt herself of the higher blood; and if you had walked up to her cottage on that August day you would have thought her justified. At Fisher's Grant you would have left behind a village of white cottages huddled closely together, as though land were of some value—and exhaling from the very pores of the houses, so to speak, an acrid odor of fish. You would have perceived through open doors in passing that every interior was clean with the spotlessness only to be attained by years of daily polishing. Men, women, and children would have been as wild in mien and gesture as corsairs, but rarely lacking in some touch of neatness, and now and

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then of coquetry, scarcely noticed by themselves, but indicative of their almost forgotten Latin origin. In Charity's garden you would have found a pretty woman with rippling, fair hair, good, gray eyes, and features that, while grave in repose, broke with the slightest smile into soft and ravishing dimples. The moment you looked at her, in her pink cotton frock, a pink ribbon in her wide-brimmed straw hat, and gardening gloves to protect her hands, you would have guessed that she must be living on "money in the bank." If you had brought with you any small gossip from the village below, you would have understood that the pink frock and ribbon were not worn from vanity; for you would have known that from morning till evening, and every day in the year, Charity dressed "for company," not knowing the moment when William Pennland would come back.

"She've a heap o' gowns as 'ud make you dizzy to look at," Sam Boutilier's Henny would have been only too glad to tell you. "They're of all colors and patterns and fashions, and she'll put on a clean one every day. It's all very well for them as has naythur chick nor child, but it 'ud never do for the like o' us. There's vessels, so the Scripture says, as is born to honor, and vessels as is born to dishonor. She be one and we be t'other. We're sailin' for the same port, no doubt; but it's on a different tack, as Sam 'ud say. Pore thing! It's well as she've got her flowers

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and furbelows to take up her time, and her awaitin' for that villain of a man as 'll never come back, no more nor the babe unborn. He's off with some other woman, that's what he is. Don't talk to me o' soldiers. I've summered 'em and wintered 'em, and you can't tell me anything about 'em as I don't know. They're as false as fine weather; and their red coats and slim figgers is nothin' but the lust o' the eye and the pride o' life, as Scripture says. I'm sure the girls I've seen in Halifax breakin' their hearts after some light o' love as they'll never see again is enough to be a warnin' to any one as has the sense to know as a southeast wind 'll bring rain. But there's that pore thing up there! She've sense enough on every pint but that. Let her marry some honest fisherman, says I. Then, if he goes off and don't come back no more, you know he's drowned, and can put on your widder's weeds accordin'. But as for this waitin' for soldiers—it's like tryin' to hatch a china egg. You may set and set, and never see feather of a chicken."

To a casual observer, looking at Charity as she moved about among the hollyhocks, sweet-peas, and mignonette, Sam's Henny's remarks would have seemed stronger than the occasion called for. There was nothing about Charity suggestive of Mariana in the Moated Grange. On the contrary, she was brisk and cheerful, and as she worked she sang softly the words of her favorite song:

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“ My love is far on a foreign shore,
Where the mighty billows dash and roar;
They tell me he will return no more—
Rad-ley-right-fol-day! Rad-ley-right-fol-day!

“ But I wear no willow nor mournful rue,
For to him this fond heart is true,
And love will lead him me unto—
Rad-ley-right-fol-day! Rad-ley-right-fol-day!”

In the tune were little quavers and grace-notes that could be varied at discretion; and as Charity's voice was as true as “ this fond heart ” to the absent lover, it was pleasant to hear her singing among the flowers.

“ My father was my joy and pride;
My brother grew up by my side;
But in the Nile's proud fight they died.
Rad-ley-right-fol-day! Rad-ley-right-fo day!”

“ My lover, he—”

But Charity stopped suddenly. Looking up by chance, her eye had caught sight of a strange sail on the horizon.

“ What's that?” she asked herself. “ That's not a this-country vessel.”

She went forward, a pair of shears in her hands and a basket of cut flowers on her arm, and peered between the tall, flaunting hollyhocks. It was only what she had done hundreds of times during the last eleven years, but always with expectation a little stronger.

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“Something tells me he’ll come to-day,” she said to herself. “ ’Twouldn’t be but reasonable if he did.”

She glanced around the garden. Already the ravages of the storm were nearly repaired, and all was as trim and gay as nature and she could make it. She looked through the open door into the cottage, where copper that glowed like burnished gold, and tin that glittered like silver, suggested abundance refined by care. From the walls Albert Edward and Alexandra, highly colored and arm-in-arm, as youthful bridegroom and bride, looked down from a gilded frame upon an apartment where, so every one said, even they might have eaten their dinner off the floor without perceptible loss of appetite.

There was one more detail. Charity turned from the cottage to the flag-staff that her father had erected on the very summit of the hill. It pleased her to note that in the stiff morning breeze the big, red banner fluttered and floated, curled in on itself and flew out again, with a gleeful activity sure to attract attention even from far out at sea. This was the last of a series of signs that were to guide William Pennland from any point of the compass to where his wife waited for him at home.

Having assured herself that all was ready, Charity turned again to peer between the hollyhocks. But it soon became evident that the strange vessel was not making for Fisher’s Grant.

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“I suppose it’s only another of them four-masted schooners from Gloucester,” she said, with a sigh.

It was not an unhappy sigh, for the years of expectation were passing pleasantly. She had much to do, and life did not lack excitement. Her house was her pride, her garden her joy, and William Pennland her romance. He was in her imagination what the vision of Zeus might have been in the later memories of Leto—something almost too beautiful ever to have been on earth, but that she had actually held within her arms. Those who live in daily communion with sky and ocean and wide land spaces grow to be dreamers of large dreams that infuse the commonplace with something of the wonderful. Thus it was that William Pennland, tall, lithe, and strong, his good figure displayed by his tight-fitting artilleryman’s uniform, and his rosy, handsome, smiling face crowned by the jaunty forage-cap, moved in Charity’s fancy as something more than man. It had not been possible for so glorious a being to remain in a life like hers; but he would come back again—like Ulysses to Penelope, or like Arthur from the mystic land of Avalon. Charity did not name these names; she only personified that spirit of hope, in the face of death, departure, or despair, which is the motive of many a legend.

Her story was a simple one. She had met and married William Pennland when she was twenty-

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three. It was just after her father's death, and in her loneliness she had gone to visit friends in Halifax. William was a frequenter of the house in which she was a guest. He was one of those Adonises meant by nature to break women's hearts. He presented that mingling of good-nature with good looks against which it is almost useless to contend. An experienced judge would have seen in him all the graces but the moral ones. Charity was not experienced, and where she perceived outward charms she took it for granted that there was a character to correspond. She gave him her whole heart; while he gave her of his what he had to spare for the moment. When they were married it was not "on the strength," for William's conduct had never been of a nature to entitle him to provision for a wife at the expense of the War Office. That circumstance seemed, however, of small account, owing to the two facts that Charity had money of her own and that William's term of service was nearly at an end. When, a few months after their marriage, his battery was ordered to the West Indies, it was thought best that Charity should not accompany him. He should soon be free, with his back pay at his command. Let her go, then, to Fisher's Grant, where he would join her the moment he became his own master.

So he sailed away, and that was all. He never came back, he never wrote, he never sent a message.

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When the transport bearing him out of sight passed down beyond the horizon's edge he went out of Charity's life. There was nothing left behind but a wedding-ring and an all-compelling memory.

She went to Fisher's Grant and waited. The first year was a hard one. She loved as only the good can love; but her devotion beat the idle air. She hoped as only the brave can hope; but nothing that she looked for came to pass. She never rose in the morning without thinking that some sign from him would come to-day; but the pitiless hours went by and brought no tidings. It was a twelvemonth of emptiness and silence.

The second year was easier. She had grown used to unsatisfied longings and to expectations unfulfilled. She still got up at dawn and searched the horizon with her father's spy-glass; but the pang was less sharp when nothing was in sight. She still questioned every strange sailor whom chance brought into Fisher's Grant; but it became more and more a matter of course that he should never have crossed William Pennland's path.

In the third year hope became a habit rather than a craving. She knew he would come back, but it might not be to-day nor to-morrow nor the next day. She accepted the fact that it might not be for years. Very well; she felt in herself the capacity to wait. She had learned how to do it. She would wait and

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make ready for him. He would return tired with roving and eager for rest. With her, then, he should find rest. He should lack nothing that love could provide. His life should be filled with plenty and cushioned with ease. He should eat of lotus and be lulled into content, and lose all desire to roam. Charity's conception of what was necessary to satisfy masculine longings lay in an abundance of everything to eat and drink and nothing at all to do. This should be William's lot; and so she pinched and pared and scraped and saved, and filled her days with all manner of delightful, self-denying preparations, in order that on his return he should spend his time in lordly idleness. That there were strange siren voices calling from out at sea she was aware, but he should be lapped in too much luxury to heed them.

But Charity did more than this. She made for herself a kingdom in the hearts of Fisher's Grant. In everything that did not concern William Pennland there was not, along the whole shore, a wiser woman than she. Piety, kindness, and common-sense were her only arts, but they carried her far into her tiny realm's affections. Whenever there was a baby born, it was Charity who first waited on his earthly needs. Whenever the boats sailed in with the tidings that Joe or Peter would return no more, it was Charity who nerved the widow for the shock and guided her

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first stumbling steps along the solitary pathway. Charity made the weak strong and the foolish wise and set the wrong-headed right; and through it all the light that shone out of William Pennland's merry eyes was the star that led her on.

III

BUT the strange vessel passed farther to the eastward, and was now little more than a speck upon the slowly heaving blue. As Charity turned her gaze away a second sigh was stifled before it had time to rise. The quick, fleeting dimples showed that a smile, imperceptible to the eye, was forming itself upon her lips; while the faint color that stole up the cheeks towards the temples was like the sunset flush that mantles on the Jungfrau. You would never have supposed that Charity was thirty-four.

“Well, if that ain’t Jonas Boutilier,” she said to herself, as she turned to straighten a tall, red-flowered hollyhock. “It’s about time for him to come round again. He hasn’t been here for near six months, and six months is about his reg’lar spell. Well, he’ll never get but one answer from me, poor Jonas—not if William was to stay away eleven years more.”

Then, as she bound the hollyhock to a stake, she began again to sing softly—the grace-notes coming out with a more conscious flutter than before:

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“But I wear no willow nor mournful rue,
For to him this fond heart is true—”

“I know how he’ll begin,” she said to herself, the smile now quite visible to the naked eye and the dimples deepening like two pretty valleys in a land of peach-colored velvet. “I know how he’ll begin. It’s always the same thing.

“‘Good-day to you, Mrs. Pennland,’ he’ll say.

“‘Good-day to you, Jonas,’ I’ll say.

“‘And how is your health, ma’am?’

“‘Pretty well, I thank you, Jonas; and how is yourn?’

“‘None too good, ma’am. I’m feelin’ the need o’ some one to take care o’ me. This peddlin’ is a hard business—a tax on mind and body, too. ’Tain’t like the fishin’, where you’ve nothin’ to do but to depend on the ways of Providence and take it easy. Peddlin’ is hard work; it’s lookin’ every way at once, so as the women won’t get the better o’ you. Now, if at the end of a trip I could think of a snug little ’ome with a garding—something like this, ma’am—and a nice little woman with a smilin’ face and a lovely ’eart, thinkin’ o’ no one but me—something like you, ma’am—and a warm meal, laid out reg’lar, life ’ud be a different thing, and I’d be gettin’ my reward.’

“‘You should marry again, Jonas.’

“‘That’s easier said nor done, ma’am; not but

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there's them as 'ud jump at the chance if they was to get it. But marriage means more'n to say, I'll take you if you'll take me. There's men as thinks that in the matter o' wedlock one woman is as good as another; but I believes contrary. I say as there's the heart as knows its own bitterness, and as 'll pick one woman out from half a dozen, and often the most unlikely. That's why I keep comin' and comin' to see you, ma'am.'

“ ‘ But I'm a married woman, Jonas; and my husband's on his way home.’

“ ‘ You're a widder woman, ma'am, if you'll excuse my sayin' so; and that's the law. Seven years wi'out sight, sound, or support makes any wife a widder; and your man's been gone eleven years. It's pore work waitin' for the clouds to return after rain.’

“ ‘ But I'll wait for him, Jonas, even if I find him only in the kingdom o' the Lord.’

“ ‘ Then you might be right, Mrs. Pennland, but I thinks you wrong. Anyway, it's hard on me, after all the times I've come to see you. And yet there's something keeps tellin' me to come. No one needn't tell me there ain't something. I feels it here, ma'am—here on the left side, a little above the liver. There's times, when I'm on the road, that I'm seized with a pinin' in the in'ards as anybody 'ud swear I was layin' up for a sickness. But mine is a dis-

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ease as only one dose 'll cure—and that's yourself, ma'am.' ”

Charity smiled as she went in thought over this oft-repeated bit of conversation, and blushed a deeper pink. She was not a cruel woman, but the thought that some one was sighing for her in vain heightened the dramatic interest that lies everywhere in life.

“ Pore Jonas!” she added, with compunction. “ When William comes I shall find ways o' making it all up to him.”

But a footstep sounded quite near the garden gate.

“ And love will lead him me unto—
Rad-ley-right-fol-day! . Rad-ley-right-fol-day!”

Charity sang as though she had heard nothing, and went on binding up the heavily bending holly-hocks.

“ Good-day to you, Mrs. Pennland,” Jonas called.

“ Jest as I said,” thought Charity. “ I knew he'd begin like that.”

“ Good-day to you, Jonas,” she said, aloud, turning round with a well-feigned air of pretty surprise. “ Goodness me, but you're quite a stranger!”

“ And how is your health, ma'am?”

“ Middlin' good, I thank you, Jonas; and how is yourn?”

“ I'm none too smart, Mrs. Pennland,” he replied, wearily.

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“Well, that’s a pity, I declare,” Charity said, sympathetically, as she reached the garden gate and held out her hand.

“I was afraid something ailed you, for I ’ain’t seen you this long spell back. Won’t you step in and have a cup o’ something? It ’ll rest you a bit.”

“Thank you, ma’am; I dunno but I will. It’s always a pleasant spot here.”

Jonas entered the garden, and, letting his pack slip off his back, left it just within the gate.

“You sit here on the bench while I make you a cup o’ tea,” Charity said, in her motherly way, as they walked up the little path, bordered with sea-shells half hidden now by mignonette, that led to the cottage door.

Jonas sank upon the bench with a sigh, and looked about him absently.

“Pore fellow!” Charity said to herself as she flitted about the kitchen, putting the best tea into the best teapot, and arranging one of the best cups beside one of the best plates on a tray covered with one of the best napkins. “Pore fellow! I wish he could set his heart on some nice woman as ’ud make him a good wife.” And yet, even as the words passed through her mind, she had a curious subconsciousness that, were her desire to be fulfilled, something pleasant would slip from her own life.

Jonas Boutilier was a small, bronzed, wizened,

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wrinkled man of forty-five. His black hair was straight and glossy, and his black eyes bright and beady. Before he became a peddler he had been a fisherman. The exigencies of both professions had left him tanned by sun and sea. His habitual attitude was that of a man beating against the wind. Even now, as he sat in the sunshine beside Charity's door, he shrank down as though cowering before a storm. His limbs were twisted and his muscles knotty, as the result of long contention with bad weather and hard work. He would have passed anywhere for an ugly man; and yet, as you looked at him closely, you saw that expression in his face which enables many of us to triumph over the most unattractive features. Perhaps it was something transmitted from the ancestral weavers and pastry-cooks, who had given up all for the sake of a great ideal—but something certainly there was that touched the sympathies and anticipated derision and dislike. If his eyes were bright and beady, the light in them was not unkind. If his mouth was wrinkled and grotesque, the smile into which it broke was not unpleasing. On the wind-swept shore there is often a battered tree that in a more sheltered spot would have grown into strength and straightness; but the nature of the tree is there, holding its own in the teeth of storms and against the odds of fate.

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As Jonas now sat crouched and cross-legged any one could see that he was not happy. He swung his foot uneasily and shifted his position with nervous frequency. It was not in his power to turn pale, but he could be agitated. As his eyes twinkled over the garden it was, for the first time, without pleasure in its gay-colored trimness; as he lifted his head and looked out over the ocean it was without taking note of sails on the horizon, or clouds on the blue, or any of the sea-signs he was accustomed to observe.

Presently Charity came out of the cottage with his cup of tea. Jonas took the tray and made a place for it on his knees.

"Thank you, ma'am," he said, in response to Charity's smile and hearty invitation to make himself at home. He tried to master his emotion as he spoke. "This is very genteel, I'm sure. There ain't a spot between here and Guysborough as is a greater pleasure to eat in than this—nor no such tastin' victuals, neither."

"Then I wish you'd come and try 'em oftener," Charity answered promptly, as she sat down on the bench by his side. She took up the basket of cut flowers and began sorting them. "I'm always glad to see you, and yet you ain't come by here since I dunno when. It's a shy bird as won't come and peck, when the crumbs is thrown out a-purpose."

Jonas lifted his eyes and glanced at her reproach-

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fully. Was she trifling with him? Or was she unconscious that her words had power to wound? In any case, it was too late to go into these questions now.

“And you wouldn’t ha’ seen me to-day, ma’am,” he rejoined, feeling that an opening had been given him, “only that I’ve something solemn to say to you.”

“That’s nice,” Charity said, briskly. “I ’ain’t had nothing solemn to cheer me up since I can’t tell the day when.”

“I’ve news for you, Mrs. Pennland.”

There was an inflection in his voice that caused Charity to turn suddenly upon him with a look of half-frightened interrogation.

“What news?” she asked, hoarsely.

“You ’ain’t heard nothin’?”

“No.”

Her heart bounded and the color died from her cheek. Jonas’s manner was mysterious; but she was afraid to hope. This, too, might be like one of those strange sails that showed themselves on the horizon, but bore away without coming into port.

Jonas lifted the tray from his knees and placed it on the bench beside him. It was a dramatic moment, and he could not hurry the action of a piece in which he had so important a part to play. He crossed his legs again and looked out to sea. Char-

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ity sat still, the basket of flowers in her lap, and a bunch of phlox and verbenas grasped tightly in her hands.

"Then you 'ain't heard nothin' at all?" Jonas asked, more impressively than before.

"No, Jonas, no."

"You wouldn't be likely to," he commented. "What I've got to tell you happened a long way from here."

"For goodness sake, what is it? You're gettin' me all worked up."

"Well, that's what you ought to be, ma'am. It's nothin' but right that you should be prepared."

"Oh, Jonas, is it about William?" she cried, leaning forward in pale eagerness.

"It is, ma'am."

"Is he dead?"

"No, ma'am, he's not dead."

"Then what is it? Oh, Jonas, tell me."

"He've come back."

Charity turned faint. She grew paler than before. The basket of flowers slipped from her lap, and the sweet-peas and mignonette were scattered on the ground. She crushed the phlox and verbenas in her hands. Then she recovered herself, while the color came back into her face with a rush and a deep flush.

"Who told you?" she breathed, faintly.

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"Nobody didn't tell me. I see him wi' my own two eyes."

"Where?"

"A long ways from here. Down by Cape Freels."

"Then why didn't you bring him? Why doesn't he come?"

"There's a hitch about it, ma'am. He've come back, and yet he 'ain't come back."

"Jonas, Jonas, what do you mean? Do tell me."

"He've come back, and yet he 'ain't come back," Jonas repeated, solemnly. "Be you prepared, ma'am?"

"Yes, I be, Jonas; yes, I be. Only tell me, for God's sake, what the trouble is."

"It's just this—he's married again."

Charity lived through the next few moments as one passes a great crisis without knowing how. Had she been told beforehand that she should have to bear this shock she would have denied the power to do so. But now that it had come she neither flinched, fainted, nor cried. Her strength rose to meet it. She looked steadily at Jonas, who kept his eyes turned away from hers.

"Who to?" she asked, at last.

The very vibration of her voice was indicative of her self-control. She was a Byfleet, and came of a race that had often shown its capacity to suffer quietly.

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“Who to?” she repeated.

“That’s the worst part of it, ma’am. It’s to a wild girl as you’ve never heard of, and as is a simple disgrace to’ve put in place o’ you.”

Jonas crossed and uncrossed his legs, and shifted himself in his seat. He was still nervous, but the worst of the strain was over. The situation was relieved by the courage with which Charity had borne the blow.

“She can’t ha’ cared much, after all,” was his reflection. “Maybe she’d begun to take up wi’ me. ’Twouldn’t ha’ been but natrel if she had, considerin’ the times I’ve come to see her. Pore thing! She ain’t a widder now—nor a wife, neither.”

He was not accustomed to grief that makes no demonstration, and it was not strange that in Charity’s calmness he should have been deceived. He had seen plenty of women at the moment when the tidings came that their sons or husbands had been lost at sea, but they had always cried out and made appeals for sympathy. In Charity’s self-restraint Jonas saw only the resigned acceptance of a sorrow of which time has dulled the bitterness beforehand.

“’Tain’t as though she’d seen him yesterday,” he reflected further; and then felt himself more free to speak.

“Won’t you tell me about it, Jonas?” Charity pleaded, softly.

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“ Well, ’twas this way, ma’am,” he began, nervously, again crossing and uncrossing his twisted legs. “ You may happen to’ve heard that my sister Betsy’s man that’s dead left her a nice bit o’ property down by Portuguese P’int. It’s a good deal of a relief to Betsy to be a widder and well provided for. She ’ain’t had much chance so far. Her man was a sober, savin’ man—that no one can’t deny. In fact, he was too sober and too savin’. ‘ Work day and night, and never spend a cent,’ was his motto, and as near as might be he tried to keep hisself and his family up to it. He’d a nice bit of a farm, for Portuguese P’int is a different country to this—softer like and greener, and not so stony. Pertaters ’ull grow there as you’d think they was weeds, and as for the cherry-trees, they’re so many as nobody ’ud believe they was fruit. I’ve seen Betsy’s two boys, when they was young uns, sit in a cherry-tree and eat till—”

“ Yes, but my husband, Jonas?” Charity interrupted.

“ That’s what I’m comin’ to, ma’am. Not as he’s your husband now—not quite, he ain’t; though, in a manner of speakin’, he’s yourn more nor hers. ’Tis you as has the first claim on him; that is, if there ain’t some other woman as has a claim ahead o’ yourn. Did you ever think o’ that, ma’am?”

Charity started.

“ No, Jonas, I never did.”

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“Oh, husbands is chancy things,” Jonas remarked, shaking his head sagely. “And soldiers is always the chanciest. Some of ’em has no more feelings than the robin, as ’ll take a new mate every spring and in every country as he flies to.”

“Don’t, Jonas,” Charity pleaded. “I cannot bear the thought o’ that.”

“I don’t want to hurt your feelings, ma’am, but you see how it is. He’s had a wife since your time, and he may ha’ had a wife before. In that case the law ’ud be that you’d be a widder, and free to marry anybody as you liked; and if there is anybody towards who your ’eart may seem to be settin’—”

“Oh, but there isn’t,” Charity said, hastily.

“Well, it’s a p’int as ought to be looked into,” Jonas insisted, with the energy of a new idea and a fresh upspringing of hope. “It ought to be looked into, and, if so, the law must take its course. Now I come to think of it, it’s a good deal like what he says to me hisself, the day I see him leanin’ over Michael Levanti’s gate, down by Cape Freels.”

“Who is Michael Levanti?”

“That you must hear, ma’am. It’s a queer story, that, and I don’t know no one as has the ins and outs of it better than me. That’s what I was comin’ to when I first began to tell you about William Penn-land.”

“But won’t you go on quickly, please?”

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"You can't sail faster than the wind 'll carry you. I ain't one to tell the end of a thing before the beginning, and I don't believe you ain't, neither. There's folks as 'ud drive a horse tail foremost and expect to get there sooner. But that ain't me. Let the head go first and the tail 'ull foller, I say."

Charity sank back and let her head rest with weary patience against the white wall of the cottage.

"So, as I was tellin' you, ma'am," he went on, "my sister Betsy bein' a widder and well left, I said to myself as 'twould be nothin' but natrel if I was to look in on her the next time I go by Portuguese P'int."

"I don't know where that is," Charity murmured.

"'Tain't likely as you do. It's not far from Cape Freels. You have to go by Cape Freels to get to it; and Cape Freels is about the loneliest spot as a body could be asked to tramp through. On my travels I always passed it by, knowin' that to go down among them pore Greek trash 'ud be time wasted and money dropped."

"I don't know what you mean by Greek trash." Charity closed her eyes and tried in a half-stunned way to follow the windings of the narrative.

"Well, you 'ain't lost much if you don't, ma'am. There's people about who the less you knows the better for you, and them Greeks is accordin'. 'Tain't the company I keep, I beg you to believe, ma'am, though Michael Levanti, as I've seen many a time, was a fine

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set-up feller, as almost anybody 'ud ha' took for a white man."

"But what had William to do with him?" Charity asked, raising her head again, with half-desperate impatience.

"I'll tell you the story, Mrs. Pennland, as Wise Willum Boutilier, my own uncle, told it to me. There wasn't much as Wise Willum didn't know, and few as he couldn't tell you about. Once upon a time, so I've heard him say, a ship was lost off Hungry Island, which lies at the mouth of the little cove between Portuguese P'int and Cape Freels. Some people say as she was a Portugee, and that that's how the P'int got its name. Howsomever, all of the crew was lost but one pore sailorman. How he got to land nobody never knowed, but to land he got. At that time the Injuns was thicker than they be nowadays, and there was a camp of Micmacs just under Cape Freels. There the sailorman was taken in, and the Injuns made out as he was a Greek—the Injuns and the Greeks bein' something o' the same blood, by what I've heard tell. At first the sailorman couldn't speak neither English nor Micmac, but just kep' sayin', over and over again, the word *Levanti*, till they understood as it must be his name. Well, to make a long story short, the Greek settled down where the sea had cast him. He married a half-breed Micmac girl, and now their grandchildren and great-grandchildren

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is dotted all along the shore—under Cape Freels—and a wild lot they be. Michael Levanti was the best o' them all. He married Hagar White, a respectable English girl—a farmer's daughter at Portuguese P'int—and moved up the shore a bit, so as to be away from his own people. That's how it come to be so lonely like when I see William Pennland leanin' over Michael Levanti's gate."

Charity bent forward eagerly. She was coming to the point at last.

"You see, ma'am," Jonas continued, "in order to get to my sister Betsy's you have to turn off the Guysborough road, down the Cape Freels road, then cut across through what they calls the Old Shore road—the lonest spot as ever I see—and so you come out into the pretty farmin' country round about Portuguese P'int. Do you take my meanin', ma'am?"

"Yes, yes, well enough, Jonas. Please go on."

"I'd left Guysborough the day before—or was it two days before? Yes, I believe it was two days before, for now I mind that I sold Jim Walker's wife the makings of a gown in white cotton sprigged with a clover leaf. I meant to ha' kep' it for you, ma'am, knowin' you was fond of sprigs, but Mrs. Walker seemed to set her 'eart on it, so I let it go. That makes it two days since I'd left Guysborough; and so I come to the Cape Freels road. It wasn't exactly new ground to me, for I'd been over it before; the

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last time was just after Michael Levanti's wife died. That might be eight or ten year ago. She'd left a slip of a girl, as I knowed must be a young woman grown by this time. So, says I to myself, Michael Levanti's house is the only one on the Old Shore road. I'll put up there for the night, and to-morrow 'ull take me to Betsy's. So I tramped along, thinkin' how pleased Betsy 'ud be to see me, when all of a sudden I met a man. I knowed he was a Levanti by the look of him. They're a tall, straight, 'and-some lot, them Levantis, black-haired and black-eyed, with the Injun look toned down by the Greek. There ain't much Injun blood left in 'em by this time, and, though they're dark-complected, nobody 'ud think as they wasn't white folks like you and me.

“‘How far might it be to Michael Levanti's?’ I asked, polite as could be.

“‘All the way to hell,’ he answered, savage-like. ‘Michael Levanti's dead—dead near six months ago.’

“With that he shot into the woods, and I didn't see him no more. Howsomever, I trudged on, calculatin' to get there before nightfall, and so I did. It was gettin' on for sunset when, at a bend in the road and close to the shore, I see the cottage, standin' a little back under some trees, jest as I remembered it eight or ten year before.

“‘Seems to be lived in,’ I said to myself, as I come

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near. 'P'r'aps the daughter has relations to stay wi' her. She wouldn't live here alone.'

"And then, ma'am, if you'll believe it, I see William Pennland leanin' over the gate, lookin' out to sea and smokin'."

"My God!" Charity murmured, under her breath.

"You may well swear, ma'am," Jonas went on. "I'd ha' swore myself if I hadn't thought it was his ghost. I trembled like an aspen leaf, I did, and it seemed as if I could feel a rash comin' out all over me. But I ain't one to be frightened easy. I remembered him as if I'd seen him yesterday. So I went up to him and give him a long look, and let him have a long look at me."

"Was he changed?" Charity asked, eagerly.

"Well, he was and he wasn't, ma'am. He was just as pretty as ever. He hadn't got on his sojer's clothes, and he was a bit stouter; but it was William Pennland as plain as a pikestaff, and wi' the same easy, saucy look as used to turn all the young girls' heads when you married him, eleven year ago."

"Oh, Jonas!"

"It was a sad sight, ma'am, I can tell you—and me knowin' how you was a-lookin' for him home these years and years back. I'll allow it made me feel a bit hot-tempered when I remembered what you'd been through. So I goes up to him and looks at him severe.

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“ ‘Good - day, mister,’ he says, quite peaceful. ‘You seem to be a peddler. Won’t you walk in and show us your wares? My wife might like to buy something of you.’ ”

At the word wife Charity uttered a little cry. She threw the phlox and verbenas from her and covered her face with her hands.

“ ‘Don’t you take on yet, ma’am,” said Jonas, gently, “because you’ll have plenty o’ that to do by-and-by. I expects your troubles is only just begun.

“ ‘Good-day to you, William Pennland,’ I answers, boldlike.

“ ‘Ah!’ he says, takin’ his pipe from his mouth and givin’ me a long stare. ‘So you know my name?’

“ ‘To my sorrer,’ says I.

“ ‘Then why recall it?’ he says, quite cool. ‘People down about here knows me as William Penn. It’s shorter and more convenient. And let me ask you to remember,’ he goes on, very perlite, ‘as peddlers who have too good a memory for other men’s business is apt to spile their own.’

“ ‘I didn’t come here to l’arn a lesson, but to teach one,’ says I, speakin’ up as brisk as him.

“ ‘That’s good for me,’ he says, laughin’ and takin’ no offence. ‘I’d rather l’arn than teach, just as I’d rather get than give. It’s easier and more instructive. How do you mean to begin, mister?’

“ ‘By askin’ you a question,’ says I. ‘How do

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you come to be here in Michael Levanti's garding, and him not six months under ground, hardly cold, as you might say.'

" 'That's easy answered,' says he. 'I'm married to Michael Levanti's daughter. And who,' he asks, laughin' and showin' his teeth—'andsome teeth they was, if you remember, ma'am—'and who,' he goes on, 'might you be, mister, that you take such a interest in my affairs?'

" 'I'm one,' says I, speakin' very slow and solemn-like—'I'm one as knowed Charity Byfleet when she was a child, as knowed her when she was a married woman, and as knows her now.'

" 'Ah!' he says, holdin' his head very high and makin' as though he didn't understand. But I noticed as how the laugh went off his face, just as you might see a light go out.

" 'And she's not dead,' says I.

" 'I'm glad to hear it,' says he.

" 'Then how,' says I, 'can you be married to Hagar Levanti when you've got a wife already above ground? That ain't law.'

" 'Oh,' he puffs, tryin' to laugh again, but not succeedin' as well as before, 'the law is different for sojers. Many a man as I know has a wife in England, and another at Gib, and another at the Cape, and another at Halifax, and another at Bermuda. We ain't peddlers and fishermen. There's rules for

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us such as ain't made for other men, and rules for other men such as ain't made for us.'

" 'Maybe,' says I, quite reasonable, ' but this ain't one. There's few knows the law o' matrimony better nor me, for I've had two wives myself,' says I, ' only one at a time,' says I.

" 'Oh, that 'ud never do for us,' he laughs again. 'Twouldn't suit our manner o' life at all. Nobody 'ud ever 'list if they had to be bound 'and and foot like that. 'Tain't natrel. 'Tain't like the song. You knows the song, don't you, peddler?"

" And then, ma'am, he begins to say over a piece o' poetry as I've often heard aboard ship."

" What was it?" Charity asked, with breathless interest. She could not bear to lose a detail of this interview, so full of fatal concern to herself.

" You won't like it, ma'am," Jonas said, apologetically. " It's good poetry, especially when well sung; but I ain't no singer now, and William Pennland didn't sing it, neither. He just said it in a kind o' low voice, tappin' on the gate-post to mark-time. It's good poetry, but it's the idee as you won't like."

" I want to hear it," Charity insisted, in a tone almost of command. " I want to know just what he said and how he said it."

Jonas stood up by the doorway and made himself ready to recite. As nearly as might be, he struck an attitude and coughed in a preparatory fashion.

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“ You won’t like it, ma’am,” he warned her again. “ It’s a bit free, as you might say. ’Tain’t respectful to the female profession.”

“ Well, let me hear it,” Charity ordered, impatiently. “ Let me know everything he said.”

“ It goes like this, ma’am.”

Jonas coughed again, and imitated William Pennland by beating time upon the door-post.

“ ‘ Oh, I’ve a wife in every port;
I’ve one down at Goree,
Another up the Sunda Straits,
And one at Saint Lu-cie.
So wheresomever I may roam
I leads a jov-yal life;
In every mess I finds a friend,
In every port a wife.’ ”

Jonas recited in a staccato sing-song, marking the metre not only by taps on the door-post but by nods of the head. He enjoyed his own performance, and rolled out the last two lines with so much sentiment that Charity was made to feel the whole composition as a statement of William Pennland’s matrimonial creed.

She flushed painfully, and, rising hastily from her seat, went down one of the garden pathways. Jonas hurried after her, and they stood together near the gate. For the first time since she had heard the bad news she seemed unnerved. He divined what

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was passing in her mind and tried to speak consolingly.

“Not as I thinks that he believed it, ma’am. He see very well he was caught, and he jest wanted to face the thing out by pretendin’ that there was one law for him and another for the like o’ me. I could tell that by what he said next.”

Charity turned a questioning face to Jonas, but did not speak.

“Says he to me, quite peaceful-like, ‘You’re makin’ for Portuguese P’int, peddler, I suppose?’

“‘Yes,’ says I, ‘I be.’

“‘Well, then,’ he goes on, ‘you’d better come in and pass the night wi’ us, for you’ll not reach the P’int before daylight.’

“You may believe, ma am, I didn’t want to sleep under that man’s roof nor eat his victuals; but as ’twas the only house on the Old Shore road, and me pretty well used up wi’ two days trampin’ from Guysborough—and not havin’ done much business, neither—I couldn’t help myself.

“‘Come in,’ he says, quite hearty, ‘and after supper we’ll talk a bit more.’

“So in I goes, and there in the cottage was his wife.”

“Don’t call her that,” Charity cried, in a tone of anger.

“Well, I won’t, ma’am, if it hurts your feelings.

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For in a manner o' speakin' she ain't his wife. If he's never been married afore, he's got no wife but you."

"What was she like?" Charity asked, slightly appeased.

Jonas hesitated a moment, and, leaning on the gatepost, looked absently over the gaudy upland slopes.

"She wasn't like nothin' as I ever see, or as you ever see—leastways, not out of a picter-book or a dream."

Charity moved uneasily.

"Was she — pretty?" The question came out hardly.

"Not by the side o' you she wouldn't be," Jonas replied, gallantly. "That's what made me wonder at William Pennland. He was a great follower-up o' prettiness, as I mind him twelve or thirteen year ago—afore he took up wi' you, ma'am. He'd hardly caught up wi' one pretty face afore he was after another. But this slip of a thing—well, she wouldn't be my taste, though I could see as how she might be another man's. She'd take a long look at me, ma'am, afore she'd get me, knowin' you was to be had; and yet—"

"I *know* she was pretty—and young," Charity said, bitterly, as Jonas paused.

"I won't conterdict you, ma'am," he admitted, "but you mustn't take it to 'eart. She's pretty, I'll

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allow, but not like no female prettiness as I ever see anywhere else, or ever expects to see. Some men 'ud find her a takesome crittur, and yet mightn't like to live wi' her; and that, I come very near to thinkin', is the case o' William Pennland. To look at, she's not pertic'lar tall, but she's slender and supple, and she moves like some sort o' slim young animal, used to glidin' through the woods. She've a skin that somehow makes you think o' beaten gold, with a red in her cheek like the red that touches the yaller on that there maple-tree. She've curly, shiny black hair, as must ha' come to her from the Greeks or the Injuns, and a flash to her big, black eyes as 'ud almost frighten you. Not that her eyes is black—not quite, they ain't; they're more the color o' one o' them pansies there—black from here, but blue if you look at 'em close to. Yes, I'll allow she'd be a takesome crittur to a good judge o' females, but her ways ain't the ways of a respectable married woman."

"Why, what did she do, Jonas?" Charity asked, with quickened curiosity.

"She didn't do nothin'. That's just it. She didn't do nothin', and she hardly said nothin'. She just sets herself down in a corner and looks at you wi' them big, shiny eyes till you feel as if she was bewitchin' you. She's like something onnatrel, ma'am. She give me the creeps, she did, so as I could scarcely eat nor drink; and I do believe as

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she gives 'em to William Pennland. I believe as he's half scared of her, ma'am. And yet she seem harmless enough—only onnatrel. It's him as does all the work—the cookin' and the cleanin' and every-thing. All I see her do was to go out and bring in a bit o' wood for the fire when he was gettin' the supper. When it come time to set down to table, up she gets and goes, and I didn't see her no more that night, nor in the mornin', neither. She might ha' slep' in the woods for anything I could tell."

"And didn't he ask you nothing about me?" Charity inquired, sadly.

"That he did, ma'am, and plenty. When that wild crittur of a girl slips away he talks about you constant. I could see plain enough as he wasn't easy in his own mind, and that he'd rather be here nor there. My belief is as he was tempted accidental. He's like a man as has stumbled into a trap, and then, feelin' kind o' orkward, laughs and tries to make out as he did it o' purpose. His high airs didn't deceive me—not a bit, they didn't. And for the matter o' that, he tells me hissself as he'd done what he oughtn't to've done, and now didn't know how to get out of it."

"Oh!" Charity exclaimed, softly, as if his regret gave her some slight touch of comfort.

"Says he to me, says he," Jonas continued—"says he, 'I'd landed at Guysborough from the West Indies,

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thinkin' I'd be somewhere near Fisher's Grant. I've been a good bit of a rover,' says he, 'during the last ten or eleven years. I've been in pretty near all the countries there is, and done pretty near every kind o' work. When a man's got the taste for rovin',' says he, 'it's like the taste for liquor; you may fight against it, but it don't do no good; it stings you and burns you and whips you till you've got to get up and go. When you're in one place you think you'd like another better; and when you've got to that place, something tells you as you must move on again. It's a pleasant life,' says he—'always breakin' wi' old friends, but always makin' new ones. I don't hold much wi' old friends,' says he; 'they're apt to be like old clothes—worn out and in need o' patchin'. Life,' says he, 'is like cruisin' among islands. It's a pleasure to touch at one here and there; but a greater pleasure to leave it behind and sail on to find another. New lands, new sights, new faces, new friends—that,' says he, 'is what I like and what I've lived for.'"

"While I've done contrary," Charity murmured to herself, as she thought of her wasted years of waiting for his return.

"And yet he goes on," Jonas continued—'I'd never quite lost the thought of comin' back to Charity. Somehow I knowed she'd be true to me, and that, whenever I got tired o' travel, I could come back

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and find her ready to welcome me home. She was that kind of a female,' says he, 'as loves you once to love you always. I've seen 'em before,' says he. 'Some of 'em is gentle, and some of 'em is jealous. Some of 'em 'ull bear pretty nigh anything, and some of 'em 'ull flash on you like furies, or stab you in the back. There was a woman as I took up with at Singapore,' says he— But p'r'aps I'd better not repeat that, ma'am. It 'ud only vex you. 'Anyhow,' says he, 'the time had come when I thought I'd better be workin' my way back to Charity. I ain't as young as what I might be, and I'd begun to feel as if I ought to be took care of. I'd had a turn in the horspital at Cape Town and another at Rio, and while I ain't delikit,' says he, 'I don't believe I'm strong. Many and many a time it come over me, on my bed o' pain at Rio, as Charity 'ud be a pleasant crittur at my piller or to wake up and see at my bedside in the middle o' the night.' That's what he said, ma'am, I assure you, and the tears was almost in his eyes when he spoke the words."

Charity's own eyes were brimming, and the quick color came flushing into her cheek. To nurse him in sickness would have been for her a happiness second only to that of pampering him in health.

"'So,' says he to me," Jonas began again, 'when I got out o' horspital at Rio I began workin' along towards the no'th'ard. First it was Demerara, then

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it was Trinidad, then it was Jamaica. At Kingston I found a Nova Scotia brig as had come down in cod and was goin' back in rum and molasses. Well, I got taken on under the name o' William Penn—a name as I often went by—and so in the course o' time I made Guysborough. 'Twasn't where I was headin' for, but somewhere on the way.' ”

“ Then he was comin' to me! ” cried Charity, glad to snatch at any straw of consolation. “ He was comin' to me, after all. ”

“ That's what I understood, ma'am. And all that kep' him back was a accident as overtook him. This is how he tells me it come about. You may remember a man by the name of Jacob Eisenhauer— ”

“ Master of the *Leviathan*, ” Charity interrupted. “ He sailed out o' here this morning. I see him rounding Needle Point. ”

“ The same, ma'am, ” Jonas assented. “ Well, that Jacob Eisenhauer, as runs mostly between Guysborough and Shelburne or Louisburg and St. John, as the case may be, he had a brother, Alick, on board the *Two Twin Sisters*—the brig as William Pennland came up north in. Him and William got to be pretty thick on the v'yage, and William asks him however he was to get from Guysborough to Fisher's Grant—him not knowin' the country like. ‘ That's easy, ’ says Alick Eisenhauer; ‘ my brother Jacob 'ull take you along o' him. I'm goin' down that

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way, too.' But when they gets to Guysborough they finds as how Jacob Eisenhauer was sailin' from Louisburg that trip and wasn't goin' to touch nowhere but at Golden Cove Mines—just under Cape Freels, ma'am. But Alick Eisenhauer is a springy kind o' chap, what isn't downed very easy, so he says, 'Oh, I'll fix that up for you, too. You come on wi' me to Michael Levanti's, and he'll send word to my brother at Golden Cove Mines as how he's to pick up you and me at Hungry Island. Michael Levanti 'ull row us out to the island, and then Jacob 'ull send a boat for us as he goes by and take us off. He's done it many a time afore for the Portuguese P'int people, because he don't like runnin' in to a harbor where there ain't a wharf.' So they settled it, and off they starts afoot to Michael Levanti's on the Old Shore road. On the way Alick Eisenhauer tells William as how he and Hagar Levanti is goin' to be married as soon as Alick comes back from his next v'yage. William says nothin' to that, feelin' the cold terrible—him bein' used to hot climates for a good many years past. It was gettin' on then for October, and the weather was chilly for the time o' year. Then the accident happened."

"What was it, Jonas? Did he hurt hisself?"

"It was only a heavy shower o' rain, ma'am, but it washed away all pore William Pennland's good intentions."

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“ Did he get wet through?”

“ He did, ma'am, and that's how all the mischief come about. He got wet to the bone and chilled to the marrer—and just after comin' out o' horspital in a hot country—”

“ Oh!” Charity cried, in an outbreak of half-motherly, half-wifely pity. “ And him without a change, as like as not.”

“ 'Twasn't no use to change, ma'am, there in the road, and the rain peltin' hard. All they could do was to run for Michael Levanti's, and when they got there they hadn't a dry inch o' skin between them. No sooner had they arrove than William Pennland fell sick, and Alick Eisenhauer was obliged to go off on the *Leviathan* without him. 'Twasn't a very bad sickness, I don't think, but enough to keep him in his bed for weeks, and when he got up he was so thin that he couldn't cast a shadder. That's what he tells me hisself.”

“ If I'd only been there!” Charity ejaculated, more to herself than to him.

“ It's a great pity you wasn't, ma'am,” Jonas remarked, “ for then the things as happened next might ha' happened different. First, just as William Pennland was able to crawl about, Michael Levanti went to work and got shot dead. He was found in the woods one day, and nobody never knowed who did it. Some says it was hisself; others says as it was

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a cousin o' his, Demetrius Levanti—him as give me the saucy answer on the road—who had a spite agin him. Anyhow, the man was dead, and they buried him. That leaves William Pennland, hardly able to hold his head up, alone in that forsaken spot with Hagar Levanti. I don't believe as she ever cared for Alick Eisenhauer. She was goin' to take him, it's true, but only for company like. When she had a fine set-up feller such as William Pennland to look at every day—and them two nearly as much alone in the world as Adam and Eve—'twasn't but natrel as she should fall head over heels in love wi' him. 'Twasn't to be expected otherwise; you'd ha' done it yourself if you'd been her."

"No, I shouldn't," Charity protested, stoutly; "and him a married man."

"Ah, but she didn't know he was married."

"She must ha'," Charity insisted. "William would ha' told them that."

"Well, you see, ma'am," Jonas reasoned, rubbing his chin reflectively, "men haven't no cause to tell every one straight off they're married, as women have. It stands to reason as a woman must be miss or missis; but a man 'll be nothin' but mister, be he married or single. When men-folks is away from home they mostly don't say nothin' at all about their wedlock, onless the question's asked and the answer has to be yes or no. I've sailed wi' men who kep' that mum on

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the subject as you'd swear marriage was a crime and they was convicts on ticket-o'-leave. Not as I blames 'em much. It don't do you no good for strangers to know as you're not free; there's more expected of you, and they respects you less. You're not asked to jine in half the nice things as is goin' on; and if you do jine some one 'll be sure to throw at you as it's very onbecomin' in a married man. I've had two wives myself, ma'am, so I know how it is. I never was one to say much about either on 'em when I was away from home, onless it was among relations. And I don't believe, ma'am, as William Pennland wouldn't ha' been, neither."

"You don't know him, Jonas."

"I know what he tells me hisself, ma'am, if you'll allow me to say so. He says as how gettin' up from his bed o' sickness he sees that pore girl, left a orfing all of a sudden, wi' no one but him to depend on, and her that crazy about him, too, as she almost wanted to keep him sick for the pleasure o' waitin' on him. 'What was I to do?' says he. 'It 'ud ill become a British soldier to desert a fellow-crittur in distress, and especially any one so young and takesome. And yet,' says he, 'twasn't right for me to be sick under such orkward circumstances. The neighbors round about ain't so very pertic'lar, but even they began to talk and say as such things hadn't ought to be. Hagar couldn't leave her own house, and I couldn't

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leave it, neither; and when we tries to get some one to come and stay there, nobody 'ud do it.' ”

“ If I'd only known!” Charity murmured to herself again.

“ No doubt, no doubt, ma'am,” Jonas assented, sympathetically. “ And yet I kind o' think they enj'yed their trouble. William as much as said so himself. He says that when he lays there, hardly able to move, and sees that pore girl, with her gold-colored skin and blue eyes as is nearly black, bendin' over him and givin' him things to take, he didn't hardly know what to do. He wouldn't ha' stayed if he could ha' gone; and yet he was kind o' glad he couldn't go. You mustn't be hard on him, ma'am, because most men as I know would ha' felt the same.”

“ Good men wouldn't,” Charity asserted, with a touch of indignation.

“ Maybe they wouldn't,” Jonas agreed, “ but when men's been in the army or to sea they mostly lose the power to tell what's exactly good from what's exactly bad. It's as if they got cross-eyed on the subjeck, so that when they tries to look at the matter one way they sees it t'other. That, ma'am, is what happened to William. When Hagar Levanti tells him they must be married, he up and agrees with her. He didn't want to, I don't believe, but he couldn't see no other way to do, she bein' an orfing and come to depend on him for everything.”

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“But I depended on him, too,” Charity said, bitterly.

“Yes’m, but you wasn’t there. Most men is like them nasturtiums—they’ll twine around the object as comes handiest. I don’t say as it isn’t weak, but every plant ain’t a oak-tree, as ’ull grow straight up of its own accord.”

“I see that now, but it has taken me eleven years to learn it.”

“Larnin’ is slow work, ma’am. It’s sorrow and hard knocks as teaches us most, and that takes time. We ain’t any of us too quick scholars about the things as God Almighty wants us most to know. You’ve larnt something in the last eleven years, I make no doubt; but you’ll larn more in the eleven as is yet for to come; that’s my belief, ma’am.”

“So,” said Charity, reverting to the real point—“so I lost him just at the minute when he was comin’ back to me. It’s hard. My God, it’s hard!”

A sob shook her, but she did not cry. She leaned on the white garden paling for support and looked with tearless, unseeing eyes down the roadway that led over the hill to the village.

“You ’ain’t exactly lost him, ma’am,” Jonas said, with another effort to be comforting. “If he’ve never been married afore he married you, he’s yourn for life. That’s the law. He may stray, but he can’t be stolen. That’s the beauty o’ husbands at the worst

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o' times. They can be borrowed, but never kept. I've known many as sailed far from port, but back they was obliged to put, sooner or later, let the wind be what it might. Love or no love, a lawful wedded wife wi' her marriage lines 'ull draw a man as the pole draws the needle. It ain't exactly dooty; it ain't exactly law; it's just nater, and something besides that men can't hardly explain theirselves. Have you got your marriage lines, Mrs. Pennland?"

"They're in the cedar chest."

"Then all you've got to do is to shake 'em in his face and he'll foller you like a baby. You've got the law on him, and he can't escape you."

"But I don't want him that way. No man shall be tied to me but by cords o' love." She lifted her head and spoke with a touch of pride.

"I don't think that's wise talk, if you'll let me correct you, ma'am. You might as well say that if that hollyhock didn't stay up of its own accord you wouldn't put a band around it. Men is a lot more inclined to fall nor hollyhocks, and most of 'em, as I know, has need of something to keep 'em straight, or crooked is what they'll go. If William Pennland is your husband, ma'am, there's no question but you ought to have him. He belongs to you as much as this here garding, and you must just put forth your claim on him. I'll back you and swear to anything as needs a oath took to make it law."

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“ But I’m not sure that I want him now. If he’s loved another woman better nor me—well, then, let her keep him.”

“ Ain’t that sinful, ma’am, if I may make so bold as to ask? Ain’t it agin Scriptur’? It don’t seem to me like you to speak that way. If you’re his wife, it’s your dooty to lead him right. Wives is wives, and what God made ’em for is partly this: to keep a husband from his evil ways and lead him like a lamb to the slaughter. That’s what both o’ mine did for me, and if they hadn’t I shouldn’t ha’ been the man I am to-day. I expected that o’ you, ma’am, when I thought you was a widder-woman. I hoped as you’d take me by the hand, like a garden angel in a picter, and lead me where I ought to go. But since it ain’t lawful for you so to do, you ought to do it, accordin’ to my thinkin’, to him who it is lawful for you to do it for.”

Jonas delivered the last words with a slight oratorical inflection of the voice and a waving of the hand. The thought was a new one to Charity, and she looked up at him with a glance of quickened hope, as though feeling that there might still be something left for her to do.

“ Ought I to try that?” she asked.

“ For sartain sure, you ought, ma’am. The Lord knows I don’t want to see you two brought together; and what I says I says agin the grain. But if my

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advice was to be asked, I'd say as you wasn't doin' your plain dooty, ma'am, until you'd gone to him and begged him to leave that pore, wild crittur of a thing and go along o' you,"

"But suppose he won't?"

"Then that 'll be his lookout. It 'll not be laid up agin you at the Judgment Day, at any rate, as it 'ud be for sartain if you didn't do your dooty now. If he won't come, let him stay. You can't do nothin' more than pray the good Lord to have mercy on 'em both. There's something nice-like about 'em, and I kind o' think He will."

"If He'd only ha' had a bit o' mercy on me—" Charity began, passionately.

"Well, p'raps He has had, ma'am, more'n it looks to you and me. I'll admit as it's hard on you; but I've often noticed that in the Lord's school the best scholars is the strictest dealt with, because, I s'pose, the Master sees as it's worth the while."

"And then if he didn't come," said Charity, following her own train of thought, "I should ha' humbled myself for nothin'."

"That's the last thing as you should think on, ma'am. Them as worries about their own pride 'ull never succeed in nothin'. 'Twas my second wife—a woman wi' a powerful gift o' wisdom—as showed me the truth o' that. She'd lay down in the dust, in a manner o' speakin', if she'd got to do it; but when

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she'd carried her p'int, as she ginerally did, she could hold her head with the highest. Humbled? Yes'm, you'll be humbled; o' that I make no doubt; but if you lead your man back into paths o' goodness, what need you care for that?"

"But I said humbled for nothing, Jonas."

"No one never humbles hisself for nothin', ma'am. There's good comes out of it somewhere, even though you and me don't just know how. You go and see the man the Lord has given you to be a wife to, and do wi' him the best you can; and if anything suffers from it, 'twon't be your pride. You won't think no more about pride when once you're face to face wi' him."

"Oh, Jonas, you're a good man," Charity burst out, with tears in her gray eyes. "I didn't know you was so good. I ought to ha' thought higher of you."

"I ain't good, ma'am," Jonas answered, with a disclaiming movement of the hand, as though he put the compliment aside. "I'm just better than some and worse than others. And if I've got a bit o' sense stowed about me here and there, it comes from thinkin' over, on my lonely tramps, the things as my two wives has said to me, and to which when they said 'em I didn't pay no heed. It's a blessed privilege to ha' had two wives, ma'am. 'Tain't one as is given to every man, and if I could only ha' got the third, as I'd set my mind on—"

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But Charity had heard and borne enough. She knew all that Jonas had to tell her, and she longed to be alone. She had no hesitation in sending him away, but begged him, as he went, to come back in the morning to take counsel with her.

“I can’t tell what I think, just now,” she said. “It’s all strange in my mind, and don’t seem as if it could be true. If you’ll come in the morning, Jonas, we can talk over what I ought to do. For to-day I know you’ll let me be and take no offence. ’Tain’t that I don’t thank you. I do, Jonas, I do. But there’s some kinds o’ sorrow as you can only wrestle wi’, as Jacob wrestled wi’ the angel in the Scriptur’s, and that’s all alone.”

“Yes’m,” said Jonas, quietly; “all alone — but for the angel. When that kind of wrestling’s to be done, He’s there.”

Jonas left her, and Charity watched him as, with pack on his back, he descended the dusty roadway and went down over the brow of the hill to the village. She ceased to think of him as soon as he was out of sight. In her mind there was room for no thought but that of her own grief.

When Jonas had gone she turned slowly from the gateway, unconsciously lifting her tearless eyes to where the red flag was flapping and curling in the wind.

“My God, pity me!” she gasped, with hands

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clutching at her heart, as though the force of its beating were too much for her.

Then she toiled wearily up the hill-side and dragged the big, useless banner down. There was no one to want it as a signal now. It need float no more.

IV

As Charity stood on the threshold of the cottage, with the flag gathered in her arms, the utensils of burnished copper and sparkling tin, arranged against the wall, glowed like jewels that have been love-tokens when the love is dead. The very perfection of their shining cleanliness smote her with a pang. With what object should she polish and scour now? With what should she fill her empty days when the useless sun brought her back each morning to a useless desire for activity? She looked round about her with a sense of hatred of the spotlessness of all she saw. She had never begun a household task without putting her whole hope in it; she had never finished it without making it an expression of her love. Now she saw that hope and love had alike been futile, and that the god to whom she had built her homely shrine would never take up his dwelling there. She drew a few hard, soblike breaths, and then went bravely in. It was the first step into a new life. She had helped other women take it 'when their staff had been snatched away, but it was a different thing to be taking it herself.

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Putting the flag down on the nearest chair, she went forward to the cedar chest that contained her few treasures. It was the chest her father had brought from overseas as a present to Mary Dauphiny. It stood open, as Charity had left it after taking out the best teapot to make Jonas Boutilier his tea. Down in a far corner was a small sandalwood box, also brought by Captain Byfleet in his young days from some far-away enchanted isle. Here Charity kept the objects and relics she held most sacred. Here were her mother's wedding-ring, a lock of her mother's hair, a lock of her father's, a copy of her father's will, a copy of her father's and mother's "marriage lines," and a copy of her own and William Pennland's. It was this last document she sought. She took out the paper and unfolded it. Yes, here it was written plainly, beginning with the pompous and cryptic words, "Know all men by these presents," that she was William Pennland's wife.

"I'm his wife. I'm his wife," she repeated to herself.

She thought of him in that far-off, lonely, half-magical spot, with the sea before him and the forests behind him and great rocks towering above; she saw him in strange dalliance with a woman whose skin suggested beaten gold, and whose eyes were purple-black, like pansies. Her simple imagination was not active, but for once, the jealous sense of her desertion lent

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her fancy wings. She saw "the strange woman" as the very type of all "the strange women" who have ever made captives of weak and wilful men. She had never read of Ulysses and Calypso; she had never seen Tannhäuser lulled by sensuous strains as he lay at the goddess's feet; but she felt blindly that in her story there was an element of cruel drama which lifted her anguish above the sorrows that commonly fall to woman's share.

"I'm his wife. I'm his wife," she repeated, not proudly or self-consolingly, but bitterly, and, as it were, with upbraiding against fate. "I'm his wife. I'm his wife. And yet the other woman has him, bound to her by golden chains. She's young and pretty, and that's the spell she's cast upon him. But I'm pretty, too," she muttered, passionately. She crossed the room to where a bit of mirror hung against the wall and gazed at herself eagerly. "No, no," she said, "I'm not pretty now. The color that was there this morning is gone, and 'ull never come back again. I look old and hard. Well, it doesn't matter. Nobody 'ull ever care. God's punished me for wanting to find favor in the eyes of a sinful man. And she'll be punished, too. She won't be young and pretty always. Then she'll find as the man who's forsaken me for her 'ull forsake her for some one else, and she'll taste the gall and wormwood of the woman who's been abandoned."

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She turned from the mirror and looked down again at the paper in her hands. "Know all men by these presents," she read, glancing at broken phrases here and there; "joined together in holy matrimony"; "William Pennland, bachelor, and Charity Byfleet, spinster"; "before God and in the presence of two witnesses." She read the names that attested to the marriage as a fact, and wondered dully what had become of "Albert Green" and "Louisa Crosby," who had acted as "best man" and "best maid" on the occasion.

"Oh, what a mockery it is!" she cried, with a quick renewal of passion. "Why should I keep it any longer? Of what use is the anchor when the ship has been lost at sea?"

She took a rapid step or two to the doorway. The wind was still high and the taller flowers were swaying with its force. A cloud of sea-gulls were sporting in it, with a heavenly effect of white, outstretched wings. Up and down they swooped, making graceful, aimless curves, and uttering hoarse cries. With a cry like one of theirs—with a cry that rent her—with the cry of a woman not used to the utterance of passion—Charity tore her "marriage lines" in two; she tore them again, and yet again, and still again. She tore them fiercely, eagerly, hurriedly; she tore them till there was nothing left but bits of paper scarcely big enough to contain a word. Then,

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with another hoarse moan like that of the hungry sea-birds round her, she let the fragments go. Out they flew on the breeze, like little, living creatures, white and dancing. The wind caught them and carried them up and down, swirling them round in tiny eddies, driving them apart, chasing them inland towards the heath-covered uplands, blowing them out to sea, or letting them flutter down amid the flowers of the garden. She watched them till there was nothing left to watch—till the last white thing had danced away to where it could be seen no more. She was glad she had done it. She began to feel a kind of exaltation. Since all had been taken from her, she would renounce all. Since William had bound himself by other chains than hers, she would cut herself free from his. The sea-gulls still swooped about her, calling to be fed. Sometimes they came so near that, as she stood in the doorway, she almost felt the air beaten by their wings. Snatching off her wedding-ring, she tossed it up among them. Again they curved and dived, as the small, shining object rose sharply in the air and then came sharply down again. Charity marked its flight and its descent. For the moment she would have been glad if one of the wild birds could have carried it out to sea or hidden it in his nest. But no; it fell straight to earth, while the white-winged creatures circled greedily and helplessly about it. It

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came down by the pink hollyhock that Charity had bound up that morning. She was almost sorry that she knew the spot where the symbol of her marriage lay.

When she turned to re-enter the cottage she felt faint. She remembered that she had eaten nothing since morning, and it was now late in the afternoon. Mechanically she made herself some tea, taking the best teapot and one of the best cups. She was conscious of this reckless use of precious articles, but the things lay there at hand, and nothing mattered now. Best and worst were terms that henceforth would have no meaning in a house to which the master had chosen never to return. Let the treasures she had kept so sacredly—the pretty household objects on which she had spent so much simple taste and loving self-denial against the day of her hero's coming home—let them lie out anywhere, for any purpose—let them be soiled and spoiled and broken! Nothing is more pitiful than the offering Love has scorned, or the sacrifice no one will accept. It is more useless than the salt that has lost its savor, and may as well be trodden under foot of men.

So Charity thought as she used the best tea and the best teapot for herself. For herself! She had never done such a thing before. She had been content with what was coarsest, in order that he at his coming should be served royally. She had added

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coin to coin out of her scant living, and bought her treasures one by one. She had hidden them away where neither dust nor rust could touch them, as the Oriental hides his golden vase or curiously wrought jade, and had taken them out one bit at a time, only to rejoice in anticipation in the pleasure they would give William. Now the china with the blue sprig on a white ground, and the pewter that any one might have taken for silver, had a common, desecrated look; they had lost their beauty suddenly, as she had lost her own; they appeared as what they were, as what she was herself, cheap, meagre things that love had glorified for a little while, but that now, since love had gone, were worthy only to be laughed at and tossed aside.

As she ate and drank her mood changed; the exaltation died away; she began to feel the emptiness of the new world into which she had entered—the world in which there was nothing to work for, to pray for, or to hope. She was used to being lonely; of that she had no fear. What smote her was the loss of her ideal. She was like a man who has waked from a dream of wealth to find himself in poverty. She was like a soul that has passed from a life of faith to find there is no God.

But among women of Charity's simple life household habits are strong. They often save the mind from going distraught and the heart from breaking.

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In a few minutes she was occupied in "making the place tidy," as she would have said herself. She could no more have kept from doing that than the ermine from keeping his fur clean. Though she knew there was no longer an object in doing so, she polished the best teapot and washed the best cups with her usual care, and put them in their usual places. The very occupation, with its mechanical going and coming through the house, soothed for a moment the sense of her wrong. Then she looked round her to see what there was still left to do.

"I must put that flag away," she said to herself, and all at once the realization of what it meant came over her. "Its work is done. No one 'ull ever want to see it floating now." For an instant she felt as if she must cry out aloud, in protest against the fate that had overtaken her; but again the womanly habit of being "tidy" came to her rescue and kept her calm. The thing must be put away. That was the next step before her.

Her hands trembled, her lips quivered, as she spread the red ensign out. Deftly, neatly, she doubled it on itself, fold upon fold; she patted it and smoothed it; she lingered over it, but all too soon the task was done. While it was in doing it was as if some memory of what had made up her life was with her still—but now that, too, was over. She made a place for the flag in the bottom of the

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cedar chest, and laid it reverently in. It was like lowering the coffin of one we have loved to where it shall be disturbed no more.

Then a new thought came to her. She would hide away from sight as far as possible all the symbols of the old life before closing the door forever behind her as she entered on the new. Going into her chamber, she brought out an armful of pretty frocks—blue, lilac, pink, pale green—she liked the tenderer tints best—flowered, spotted, striped. She had had them because she knew William's taste, and had meant that at whatever moment he might return he should find her at her best. One by one she folded them and laid them in the cedar chest. As each pretty, flimsy thing disappeared beneath another it seemed as if some portion of her youth, her hope, her object in staying here on earth had gone. She was not vain; she had never had much coquetry; her mind was set on serious purposes; but she could not deny a pleasure in these dainty prints, with their delicate shades and varied patterns and reflections of the fashions of the day. It was as much a part of her womanliness as her devotion, or her courage, or the minuteness of her housewifely care. She loved the pretty things, but they, too, belonged to her days of hope and must go where the rest had gone.

When the task was finished she dressed herself in the simple black, prepared in case of sudden tid-

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ings that William would return no more—and then all was over. The little ritual acts of burying her love were ended. There was nothing left to her. She could only sit down with empty, folded hands and think upon the fading of her day-star.

She sank into a chair by an open window, not because she was tired, but because there was nothing else to do. She was without an object, without an occupation. It was at this tranquil moment of the afternoon that she generally made her visits to the fishermen's wives, carrying flowers or some homely delicacy, or a garment she had sewed or knitted for a baby. She had felt that she had much to share, and had been glad to share it. Now she was despoiled of all, and could never help or comfort any one again. If, when her household tasks were done, she stayed at home, she found this a peaceful moment in which to spell out her Bible. Now the big book lay there, with dangling ribbons to mark her favorite pages; but when her eyes fell on it she turned them hastily away, as from a former friend who has been false to all his promises.

In a kind of stupor she gazed on the scene stretched out before her. All the clouds had drifted from the sky and the last signs of the storm had vanished. The sea had grown summer-like again, and its roll was long and gentle. Where it curled in and touched the coast there was only the merest edge of foam. In

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the level rays of the descending sun the successive headlands were pale blue in the foreground, then a deeper blue, till far in the distance they were dim with a haze of amethystine purple. The reef-like islands, at mid-day but dull-brown rocks, were touched now with a tint of topaz. All the heath-clad inland hills were aglow with a gleam as of burnished metal, here of copper, there of gold, elsewhere of some blue-green enamel. Of human life there was not a sign—not a sail on the sea, not a boat in the bay, not a wreath of smoke from the village.

“ ‘Placed alone in the midst of the earth,’ ” she murmured, quoting, as she often did, from some half-understood passage of the Bible, her daily reading.

In the stunted maple a bird began to trill his evening song; out of the wild vegetation beyond her gate a partridge started with a sharp, sudden whir of wings; sea-gulls uttered their mournful cries; bees, seeking their nests farther inland, droned away from the flowers.

“ ‘And was with the wild beasts,’ ” Charity quoted again.

The sense of her desolation made her shiver. She felt herself thrown back for support on mere, cold nature—a mother she scarcely loved, whose gifts she found too scanty. The row of headlands fronting the Atlantic, and the vast spaces of upland, sea, and sky were dear to her only because they were familiar.

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Even the garden had given her pleasure chiefly because William had the old-fashioned love of flowers inherited from a race of English cottagers. She knew that now. She knew that their beauty appealed to her only because it appealed first to him. Her own instinct was set towards the useful; it was for William's sake that she had come to care for gay and pretty things and to find what there was in them to enjoy.

"I shall never touch a flower again," she said to herself, her heart sinking to despair. "The garden can run wild, for all I care. In a year or two it 'ull be just as A'nt Ellen left it."

Her eye sought out in a corner the few roots of caraway, tansy, and old-man's-love that had made the whole garden when she had come there as a child. It had been a bit of sentiment with her to keep these humble herbs carefully tended in memory of the good old woman who had closed Mary Byfleet's eyes.

"I'll tend 'em still," she thought, in correction of what she had said before. "They oughtn't to be let die. I'll tend the flowers father planted, too. But nothing else—nothing as I've grown for *him*. Pore father!" she went on, in dull reminiscence of other days—"pore father! he didn't know as my life was to be blighted. I'm glad he didn't. I'm glad he ain't here now. It 'ud fret him to see me left like this. I cried when he was taken, but now I'd rather

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have him gone. It's a mercy as parents don't know what their children 'll have to bear, otherwise they'd never have the courage to bring 'em up. That larkspur was the first thing he ever planted."

Something like a sad smile hovered on her lips as she thought of the old sailor's joy in the novelty of living on dry land. She remembered his childish ecstasy when Aunt Ellen's herbs sent up their tender shoots the first spring that they were there. One might have supposed they were in some early stage of the creation and that nothing had ever grown before. He watched them uncurl their first red leaves, disclosing the pulpy stalk within; he tried to see them doing it, but could never catch them in the act. He measured them day by day, and while there never was any difference between one morning and the last, these strange, living things, so fragile and yet so strong, steadily pushed their way upward. It was a great mystery, and made Captain Byfleet ponder.

"Nobody needn't tell me there ain't a God when I see such things as them," was the deduction he drew from his searchings into nature.

When Captain Eisenhauer — Jacob Eisenhauer's father—put in one day to Fisher's Grant, and in the course of a friendly call asked Captain Byfleet if he could do him anything in the way of service, the latter replied:

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“Yes; when next you come by here you can bring me a root of some sort o’ flower as ’ll live in the ground all winter and shoot up in the spring.”

“Lord love the man!” Captain Eisenhauer had roared; “he’s gettin’ childish, and him only goin’ on’ for seventy.”

But on his return trip from Shelburne he brought a healthy young larkspur planted in a bucket. Charity remembered how Captain Eisenhauer had laughed till he almost cried when he saw her father’s joy.

“Anybody ’ud think as he’d captured a pirate,” he shouted, as he watched Captain Byfleet, with rheumatic steps, carry his prize down to what he already called “the garding,” preparatory to transplantation.

That was the beginning; but monk’s-hood followed larkspur, and scarlet-lightning followed monk’s-hood. Then in succeeding years there came rockets, sweet-william, Prince-o’-Wales’s-feather, bleeding-heart, marigolds, columbine, cherry - pie, jumping - betty, crown-imperial, love-lies-bleeding, poppies, peonies, and roses. Captain Byfleet had sought the loam from far and near, bringing it home a few handfuls at a time, wherever he could surprise one of stingy nature’s stores. It was slow work, and “the garding” was still of modest pretensions when Charity had come back, a married woman, to wait for William Pennland.

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Her visit to Halifax, with all that it included, had enlarged her horizon. It had given her not only new outlooks upon life but new ideas upon growing flowers. William had taken her to see the general's garden, in which a friend of his own had a position of honor, and Charity had carried away much information of which she made use on returning to Fisher's Grant. In a few years her cottage was almost hidden by honeysuckle on one side the door and Virginia creeper on the other. The low stone walls about her bit of ground showed themselves only through rows of hollyhocks, sun-flowers, dahlias, and sweet-peas. She and her father had been contented with perennials; they had rather despised the short-lived things that could not sleep through winter's snow and wake up with the spring. Now she learned the delight of growing annuals, of preparing the ground and sowing, of watching and watering and weeding, of transplanting and trimming and training, of presiding over all the processes from the appearance of the seedling above the ground till the completion of its tale of thirtyfold, sixtyfold, or a hundredfold.

Following her father's example, Charity sought loam on the neighboring uplands, as the bear seeks wild honey. She robbed the sparse maples of their nourishment, and marked where the clumps of golden-rod grew so that she might take their sustenance

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away. The ungenerous bit of ground she called her own was enriched as Napoleon enriched the Louvre—by spoils. Nature, as Charity knew her, needed compulsion, but under compulsion she did much. Out of the earth that hitherto had produced only bunches of bracken or ox-eyed daisies or wanton, magenta fire-weed—of the very tint of shame—there now grew many-colored beds of verbenas, phlox, asters, and mignonette. These new creatures of but one summer came flaunting a loveliness that nearly outshone the steady-going, steady-growing peonies and bleeding-heart; but Charity loved them all. She liked to see the old roots send up year by year their vigorous young shoots; and she liked, too, to watch for the first breaking of the tiny two-leaved seedling. The first bud was to her like the baby's first smile to the mother; the first flower was like the first lisping word; and, like the mother still, she did not forget the spring-time when, in the autumn, all the flowering was done and she broke the pods and gathered the seeds and did them up in little paper packages, preparing for the pleasant seasons that were yet to come.

Resting her cheek on her hand and looking out over the sea—whose surface reflected now, of the waning sunset colors, only pale rose, as of the pink diamond, and tender green, as of the chrysoprasus—Charity went back thus over the years that had brought her to the present hour. She did not notice

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when the sun went down nor when the flowers closed their cups nor when the sea-gulls ceased to sweep and circle up from the shore below. In the stillness of eventide voices could be heard down in the village—children calling to one another in their last moments of play. Before it grew quite dark a boat shot out from the beach, and in it a girl was singing. At any other time Charity would have noted these small incidents and have said to herself, “San Boutillier’s Tom and Jinny is going home to bed, and Mary is rowing over to t’other side to fetch back her father. He’s likely been down to Mount Misery to see if the *Mermaid’s* been heard of yet.” She loved to follow the details of the neighborly life about her and share in its homely interests. But tonight she had no thought for them; she had no thought for anything; as the evening deepened she had no thought even for herself. Darkness came, but she did not light her lamp. Heavy odors floated from the garden, but she did not breathe them in. The headlands were blotted out; the sea alone was faintly visible, glimmering in the starlight with a weird, ghostly sheen, like the first glimpse of the Ocean of Death to the Pilgrims toiling towards it.

In after-years Charity never knew how she lived through that summer night. Perhaps worn out by emotion, she slept even as she sat at the window. Perhaps she grew benumbed to sight and sound and

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physical feeling, while her mind called up, as the Witch of Endor summoned Samuel, the scenes of her simple past. She knew only that the hours went by and that she was startled when a faint streak in the east announced the early Northern dawn.

"It's day. It's day," she murmured, coming back to reality, "and I haven't said my prayers or gone to bed."

She rose and lit a candle. Again she felt faint, and again she made herself some tea. As she ate and drank she watched the light in the east grow brighter.

It had been only a yellow streak at first, low down on the horizon, but already above the yellow there was a tinge of red. The tinge became a flush, and rose and widened till it melted away into the blue-black above it. Then the yellow line deepened into orange, and the orange took on a hue of fire. The ocean, gleaming duskily, mirrored the light and color, not over its entire bosom, but only far on its eastern edge. All the rest of the sea was dark; all the zenith of the sky was star-bestrewn.

"I can't go to bed now," Charity said to herself, as she finished her frugal repast. "'Tisn't worth while. And I don't feel as if I could say my prayers—not yet."

She put the candle out, and, drawing a shawl about her, sat down again at the open window. The early morning air had keenness in it, but she was

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used to an out-door life; she felt that the freshness of the barely perceptible salt wind would do her good.

In the east the light was spreading—rising, throbbing, quivering, beating the darkness back. From the headlands it seemed as if some mighty hand had drawn a veil. They were just visible, gigantic and dim, like a row of eternal sentinels. The ghostly sea came more and more into sight, gleaming with its cold, metallic lustre, save just under the horizon, where it reflected the mounting dawn. Across this splash of color and brightness Charity could see a schooner heading with sails set for Fisher's Grant. It was like a magic ship traversing a sea of glory. But she did not take her father's spy-glass or look at the vessel again. "There's no one aboard for me," she sighed, and shivered as she said it.

Steadily and with imperceptible progress the light stole and trembled upward. It filled the whole eastern sea. It touched the brown brows of the headlands as with bronze, and threw shafts of splendor up the narrow fiords between the hills.

To Charity the wonder of the newly coming day was a familiar thing; she had seen it too often to pay it any attention. She was not thinking of it as she sat looking out on all this useless beauty flung wantonly to a race whose first need is bread. She was not thinking at all. She was only hungering

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for the hope that had been taken from her. She was only pleading dumbly for the strength to go on without it.

“ I will never leave thee nor forsake thee.”

She could not tell why those words should have come to her; but they came. She stirred slightly, as if she had heard a long-absent but familiar voice. Last night she would have rejected the words as false and meaningless; but this morning she let them stay.

“ ‘ I will never leave thee nor forsake thee,’ ” she repeated, half aloud. “ They’re Bible words; they must be true.”

She turned her eyes slowly towards the big book with the hanging ribbons. It was just discernible in the twilight. Her gaze rested long upon it, as if in reconciliation. Then she looked out again over the marvels of the sky and sea.

“ When I am in heaviness I will think upon God.”

She started again. It was as if the words had been spoken outside her. They were familiar to her from her conning of the Psalms, but they had never had any significance before.

“ Well, He’s all I’ve got to think on,” she said. “ If I’d thought more o’ Him and less o’ mortal man, it ’ud have been better for me now.”

“ Thy Maker is thine husband,” said the silent voice again. “ As the bridegroom rejoiceth over the bride, so shall thy God rejoice over thee.”

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“My husband! My husband!” she repeated, her eyes fixed on the rim of gold that had just begun to show itself above the water’s edge. “My Maker is my husband! My Maker is my husband! O my God, I will try to give Thee the love there’s no one on earth to receive.”

She bowed her head into her hands. The work of resignation had begun. She did not see the sun slip up out of the sea, gilding its glassy surface, and calling forth responsive rays from everything on earth able to send back a shimmer of color or sparkle of glory.

When she looked up again it was full day.

“I must say my prayers,” was her first thought. “My Maker is my husband. He will never leave me nor forsake me. When I am in heaviness I will think upon Him. Yes, I can say them now.”

She went slowly into her chamber and sank beside the bed. When she rose from her knees she went out into the garden. At the foot of the pink hollyhock there was a small gold ring. She picked it up. Round about, in the wet grass, were a few fragments of her “marriage lines.” She picked them up, too.

She would not replace the ring on her finger. “It ’ull never go on till he puts it on hisself,” she said. But she hid it, with the recovered scraps of paper, in the sandal-wood box, which she locked up in the cedar chest. Her bit of revolt was over. She was

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making herself ready to submit. She could not submit yet, but she felt that she should learn to do so. When Jonas Boutilier came later in the day she was willing to go with him and stand face to face with William Pennland.

V

IN the mean time certain primal emotions were astir in the house on the Old Shore road.

A familiar story was being told again. Ulysses, tired of the caresses of Calypso, was beginning to long for Ithaca, Penelope, and home. Tannhäuser, faint with dalliance in the Venusberg, was turning towards the Wartburg, Elizabeth, and a possible redemption. In a word, conscience was awakening; not very actively, not with any rush of emotion or imperative impulse towards right; but feebly, blindly, like a new-born thing acting by instinct rather than by will. It was not the conscience of David, lying prone all night upon the earth; it was not the conscience of Judas, going out to hang himself; it was the conscience of the man who has scarcely known that he has had one; it was the conscience that, during a lifetime, has been smitten and smothered and beaten back, but which, with the tenacity of purpose that conscience possesses, has lived on and waited its time to speak. When it did speak it was timidly, as though not daring to make itself heard.

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Its only effect on William Pennland was to cause a vague uneasiness.

“I’ve done what I oughtn’t to have done,” was his inward comment; but that had been true so often that it was hardly worth while noticing the fact.

Still the thought remained with him, disturbing the tranquillity of his convalescence and haunting the Eden he had found on the Old Shore road. That was before Jonas Boutilier had passed by and called up to William Pennland visions of Charity as still lovely and loving and — his wife. Jonas had not scrupled to use his colors boldly. He had painted not only a fair woman watching for her lord, but a comfortable home waiting for its master. The tale of Charity’s eleven years of expectation both touched the soldier’s vanity and increased his remorse. From that time onward he was changed. Hagar’s exotic beauty began to lose its power. He still owned its charm, but he knew that it moved him less. He began to think of her as a wild creature who had come into his life for a little while, but had no permanent place there. He was used to light and easily severed ties; he had formed them often; he had broken them often; they were made with a few honeyed words; they were ended with a few scalding tears; then they were forgotten. Hagar Levanti had not been the first, but he was resolved now that she should be the last.

“I’ve done what I oughtn’t to have done,” he said

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to her, as they walked up and down the stony bit of beach before their cottage door.

She looked at him long with eyes dark and dilating, as though trying to fathom his thought.

“There’ll be rain to-morrow,” she remarked, quietly, at last. “There’s a veil on the face of Frey Luiz, and that’s always a sign of rain.”

She pointed to a thin cloud of mist hanging on the summit of Cape Freels—a huge mass of rock, starting straight from the level of earth and ocean, and reminding William Pennland of Gibraltar.

“I haven’t been a good chap,” he pursued, moodily. “But I’ve never done anything like this before.”

The woman looked at him again, this time with perceptible uneasiness, as they paced up and down the beach together.

“Some people thinks,” she went on, apparently heedless of what he had said—“some people thinks as it’s Frey Luiz’s spirit as sits up there and brings the tempest with it. I don’t believe such tales. My father didn’t, neither. But most of the Levantis is more afraid of Frey Luiz—Brother Louis, as they calls him sometimes—than they be of God.”

“We’re all like that till we begin to smell death,” said Pennland. “Then we find as God is the thing to be reckoned with first, and that the Brother Louis we’ve been thinking so much about is only made up out of our own heads. I’ve had a Brother Louis,

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too. I've grown gray in his service, and now I see as he's only William Pennland in another form."

"Oh, but there *was* a Brother Louis," she explained, hastily. "He was a priest comin' to preach to the Injuns, and was lost in the Portugee ship as went to pieces on Hungry Island. Frey Luiz they called him in Portugee, so the Levantis say; but it came easier to make it Freels. It was a long time ago, but that's what my father told me. Look, William, look," she cried, stopping in her walk and pointing upward again. "See how he curls around the cape. Anybody 'ud say it was a ghost or a angel. Now his long, white robe trails away and hides his feet. Now he spreads his wings as if he was flying from the sky. Now he's lifting his hands like a priest at mass. Now his head is all shining with gold and his robes tinted like roses—but that's only the shadder o' the sunset. If you wasn't here I'd be frightened. Many a time when I was a little 'un, after mother died and father was away, I've run to hide myself when I've seen him begin to climb up the cape like that. But I'm never frightened where you are, William, dear. You're so tall and straight and strong—"

"I'm growin' old," he interrupted, sullenly.

"But I like you better that way. I like the silvery touch on your hair, as it curls around your temples. I like that white bit brushed up off your

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forehead. I like the lines in your face—they ain't wrinkles yet, nor won't be—as shows that you're a man as has seen and done and felt things—and not a sailor boy like Alick Eisenhauer, nor a farmer like the men at Portuguese Point, nor a miner like one o' them from Golden Cove, nor a savage like a Levanti."

She reached up and pushed back the old Scotch bonnet he was wearing.

"Ah!" she cried, with a light laugh, "there's the line of your sojer's cap slanting across your forehead. I love to look at it. It's tanned now—but it'll never be tanned as dark as the rest. Why did I never see you in your sojer's clothes? You must ha' been pretty then, but you're prettier now. Oh, William, how different the world is to me since you've come into it!"

"Perhaps it 'ud ha' been better for us both, Hagar, if I hadn't."

She laughed again, and, setting the Scotch cap jauntily on his curls, moved on along the beach.

"Frey Luiz has changed in that little minute," she said, again paying no attention to his words. "He's all leaden-colored now. There'll be rain for sartain. And hark! Listen to the waves grating on the pebbles. When you hear that kind o' growl you know as there's mischief brewin' out at sea. Thank God, none o' my people was ever fishermen. My father despised 'em. He used to call 'em water-rats.

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We was always woods-people," she added, proudly. "The sea-life is empty. The woods-life is full. The sea-life ain't life at all. The woods-life is true life, where you can feel young and strong and joyful. Once when I went to mass at Golden Cove I heard the priest tell as how when God first made men He put 'em, not in boats nor yet in steamers out at sea, but on good, dry land, where there was plants to grow and birds to sing, and pleasant living things to herd with."

"But I ain't one of the woods-people, Hagar, darling," William Pennland began, rather tremulously.

"Oh yes, you be, William," she cried, clasping his arm—"yes, you be; ever since you married me. You wasn't one before, perhaps; you was only drifting about the world, trying to find me. But now that we're here together—now that we're one in heart and life and soul—we're woods-people, both of us. Haven't you said many a time that there was nothin' like the smell o' the earth with the moss tufted on it and the bracken pushing its way up, and the trees standing firmer than men can ever stand? Haven't we listened half the night—with the window away from the sea standing open—to the dear little wild things chirping and peeping and calling, as God meant 'em to do? You said you liked it, and you did. You said you was happy, and you was. Oh,

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William, there ain't no happiness like that of two together—away from everything, away from every one, and all in all to each other."

"But it don't last," he muttered. "It *can't* last. It ain't real, Hagar. For a while you feel as if it 'ud go on forever, and then one day you find as it's all over. You don't know how it's come about. You've just lost it, and that's all. It's broken like a pretty bubble, or it's faded like a pleasant dream. You're in heaven while it lasts, but when it's ended you don't want anything so much as to get back to earth again."

"Do you mean, William," she asked, speaking slowly, "as love like ours could ever have an end?"

"Love," he answered, speaking slowly in his turn, "is like light. There's two kinds. There's the light as comes quietly with the dawn and goes quietly with the sunset, but is steady and useful, and lasts all day. And there's the light of lightning, that strikes you fierce and sudden, that nearly blinds you, but is all over quickly and leaves you in the dark."

"And which kind is ours?"

She put the question with an effort. It was as if she had forced herself to come to a point she had been struggling to evade.

They were at the end of the beach, and as they turned he stopped and looked down at her. All his life he had been a slave to woman's beauty in one or

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another of its types. He had worshipped it, and betrayed it, east and west and south. As dashing soldier, picturesque sailor, and romantic rover round the world he had never lacked victims to his smiles and wiles and faithless promises. It had not been all his own fault. The women had thrown themselves before him, and when he saw the quivering lip or the brimming eye he had had no power of resistance. To be loved made of him a lover—for the moment. Then there were no declarations too ardent to make or vows too passionate to take. They were not wholly false, for in the utterance he believed them true. But, as he said himself, "It didn't last." On the very eve of sailing away he could swear never to leave the woman who was clinging to his arm and yet not wholly realize that he was lying. At times he was conscious of a twinge of remorse, but he had unbounded faith in a woman's capacity for "getting over it." The tears shed in his presence melted him; those poured out when he had gone were no more to him than rain.

Now, as Hagar stood looking up at him, the question trembling from her lips, there were circumstances that moved him more than love. It was hard on him that they were the very enemies he had no power to fight against. Good resolutions to return to his lawful wife were forming themselves obscurely within his brain; vague aspirations towards freeing

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himself from an evil life before beginning definitely "to smell death" were rising in his soul. He had an animal-like instinct that he was nearing his appointed term, and with it there arose the longing to die in the nest where he belonged. After the vagabond years home was a word that began to have a powerful attraction, and home meant Charity.

But here was Hagar—young, supple, suppliant. It was neither his fault nor hers that the damp wind made her soft, black hair twist about her temples like tendrils of the choicest vine; but it did so, and created a temptation. The color that reminded Jonas Boutilier of beaten gold, or of the red on yellow of the autumn leaf, was not the result of artifice; but it was there and would have weakened any man. The eyes that were neither blue nor black came to her from the Greek or the French or the Irish or the Indian or the English streak in her mixed descent; but whatever their origin, they were turned on William Pennland with an appeal he had never known how to withstand. That was not his fault; he was not to blame for it. He did not analyze her charm; he did not say that her small, classic features and neck, like a little ivory column, were Greek, nor that her vivacity when alone with him was French, nor that her impassivity before strangers was Indian, nor that her outspokenness was Saxon. He could not separate these elements from one another or trace

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them to their source. He knew only that they were there—living, adoring, ready to weep before him—and that he was a man to whom it was an instinct to vow that which he could not pay.

Night was descending fast; the sea was screeching on the pebbles, heralding the rain; Frey Luiz had thrown his veil over the whole cliff and the cape was hidden behind it. In William Pennland's newly awakened conscience, too, a veil seemed suddenly to come down. Charity and her garden were blotted out. Hagar, with her questioning eyes and trembling lips, were the realities of the moment.

"Which kind o' love is ours?" she insisted, when he did not reply at once. "Is it the light that lasts all day till our sun goes down? Or is it the lightning that flashes for a minute and then leaves you as you was—if it hasn't struck you dead?"

"Both," he answered, taking her into his arms. "When it came it was our dawn; when it goes it will be the twilight, when neither you nor me 'll want it any more. But it's struck as straight as lightning, and it's as pure and true."

She shook with a little sob as she buried her face on his breast.

"Oh, William, I was beginning to think that you felt different," she began; but he stopped her confession with caresses.

And yet early in the morning, when the cold day-

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light had dispelled the glamour of dying passion, the refrain began again: "I've done what I oughtn't to have done. You're in heaven while it lasts, but when it's ended you don't want anything so much as to get back to earth again. I *must* get back to earth again—and Charity. It 'll break Hagar's heart, but she's the last as I shall ever be guilty of."

It was a piteous necessity, but one more or less could count for little in so large a summing-up. He felt that he had at least that consolation.

VI

"I OUGHT to begin to work again," he said, when their breakfast was ended. "I'm well now. I'm getting strong. I must go to Portuguese Point or Golden Cove and try to find something to do."

"But not just yet, William, dear," she pleaded. "You can work soon—but not just yet; you'd fall sick again."

"I'd be better working," he insisted. "I ain't used to bein' idle. It's bad for me."

He was nervous and restless. He was sorry not to have spoken out more boldly the night before while on the beach. He wondered whether she suspected what he had to say. She was so eager to avoid the subject that he almost thought she knew. Perhaps, if he found work elsewhere, he could drift away from her silently, as he had drifted away from Charity. But no; there was something cowardly in that. He had done it before, but in his new-found desire for a more worthy life he felt a repugnance to doing it again. Her very candor forced him to be frank with her; her very innocence would make it necessary to deal her the full blow.

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"It's fine this morning after the rain," she said, going to the open door. "Don't the woods smell fresh? Don't it do you good to see the trees dripping as if they'd had more than they could drink? There's the fern and the golden-rod, that were so draggled and dusty, all green and gold and sparkling. The very birds and insects is out, glad of the good rain. It comes to the withered earth as love comes to a withered life—as your love, William, came to mine. I was so lonely before that! It was as if everything about me was parched and dry — as if there never could be nothing for me but poverty and dullness. And now!" She turned towards him with a smile that showed her white, even teeth. "Now, William, my beloved, the whole world is mine; the rain is fountains and the flowers is jewels and the birds is music, and all day long is a happy dream."

She opened her arms to him and he came towards her. Her small figure, clad in a coarse woollen stuff of sombre green, suggested to him some slender creature of the woods.

"Couldn't we do something to-day?" she asked, as they stood with clasped hands looking out on the rain-refreshed forest. "'Tain't a day to stay indoors, and yet the woods is too wet for walking in. Let's take the boat and go over there." She pointed to Hungry Island, a long, low patch of rock and sand and stunted spruce lying a few miles from shore.

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"I love to be out there wi' you," she went on. "It's so lonely, no one goes there for months at a time, unless it's somebody from Portuguese Point to be took off by Jacob Eisenhauer when he's making the trip to Halifax. Out there it's as if there wasn't no one but you and me in the whole world."

He was listless in his very restlessness and let her have her way.

"There's nothing else to do in this God-forgotten spot," he said to himself, but even in saying so he noted how far he had travelled from the time when merely to have Hagar near him had been enough.

"I'll row," she said, when a little later they were in the boat. "You just lie in the stern and rest."

He did as he was told, lounging lazily. He watched the wooded shore recede, while he wished he was quitting it for good. He responded faintly when she flashed on him one of her vivid smiles, while he wondered whether Charity still retained her dimples. He marked the lines of Hagar's figure as it swayed rhythmically to and fro; he observed the brilliancy of her eyes and the fresh tint the exertion brought to her cheeks, and the strength of her small, sun-browned hands clasping the oars. He pitied himself for being exposed to so much temptation.

"If she wasn't the takingest creature that ever lived, I should ha' been wi' Charity long ago," he said, in self-excuse, and yet the excuse was unavail-

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ing. He felt that he had not been a man—that he must find some way out of his difficulty or die a deceiver and poltroon.

The thought haunted him all day as they sat on the sands talking or wandered among the rocks frightening the sea birds. While he listened to her pouring out her love he was trying to find the words that would stab her to the heart.

“There’s no easy way,” he said to himself, at last. “I’ve found that out long ago. You can’t commit a murder tenderly. It’s got to be brutal and sharp—with her as with the others. Oh, my God,” he groaned inwardly, as she prattled on, “why can’t I do it as I used to? What makes me so nervous and soft-hearted? Once the knife is in she’ll soon get used to it—unless she tries to track me down and kill me, like that woman at Hong-Kong. That’s the worst o’ mixed blood. You can’t depend on it no more than on the sea. It makes them as is the gentlest in love often the bitterest in revenge. I don’t think Hagar ’ud be like that; but you can’t tell. When she’s got on her stony look and sits and stares she’s another kind o’ crittur from what she is to-day. Women is always changeable, but she seems to turn into some one else. Oh, why didn’t I go on to Charity at once when I landed at Guysborough? Then I shouldn’t ha’ had this desperate business on my hands.”

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The day wore on to afternoon, and they followed the sun round to the landward side of the island. The sea was smooth and blue and shot with light. Far off to the west they could see the soft, green, low-lying fields of Portuguese Point dotted with barns and homesteads. To the east Cape Freels rose up in sweeping lines against the sky, like a monument built by God himself in memory of wrecked primeval continents. From the base of the rock to the shores of Portuguese Cove stretched the long, lonely wood of spruce and pine, in which their own house was the only dwelling-place. Pennland sat down on a low, gray boulder; Hagar threw herself, like a child worn out with play, upon the coarse sea-grass. For the first time that day she was silent and seemed to want to rest.

“It’s now or never,” he said to himself. “Poor girl! It’s a pity she didn’t marry Alick Eisenhauer. She wouldn’t ha’ had the happiness she’s had with me, but she wouldn’t ha’ been brought to this—nor me, neither. Anybody ’ud blame me if they knew what I was about to do, but I’d rather be in her place than in mine.”

“Hagar!” he said, aloud, sharply and suddenly.

She looked up quickly, raising herself on her arm.

“Yes, William. Ain’t you well?”

In her tone there was the eagerness of anxious, watching love.

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"Hagar," he went on, speaking rapidly, "haven't you noticed that I ain't happy?"

"Oh, William; I thought you was."

"I ain't, Hagar. I never can be till I've told you the truth."

"No, don't," she pleaded, hastily. "Don't tell me. Let it be. I don't care anything about the truth."

"I must," he insisted, hoarsely. "You've got to hear it. I've done you a great wrong."

"Then I don't want to know what it is. I've thought there was something—I've been sure there was something—but I don't want to know what it is."

"But it comes between us."

"It don't, William—it don't. When two love each other as we do, nothing comes between 'em. Don't tell me about it. I won't listen. Let it be, William—let it be. We're alone in the world, you and me—"

"No, Hagar, I'm not alone." He bent and looked into her eyes as she gazed up into his. The words were coming readily now; it was the awful impulse under which a man, when he has once plunged in the knife, finds it easy to strike and strike again. "I'm not alone. There's some one nearer to me than you—a great deal nearer."

She put up her hands, as though warding off a blow.

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"I don't care, William," she cried; "not as long as you stay with me. Don't tell me any more."

"I've got a wife—another wife than you. I've been married to her for years."

"I don't care," she said, promptly. "I don't care for nothing, so long as you stay with me."

"But I'm not going to stay with you, Hagar. I'm going away."

"Then I'll go with you."

"You can't. I've got to go alone."

"Where?"

"Back to her."

"Why?"

"Because I belong to her, Hagar. Because we belong together."

"And what of you and me?"

"That must be all over, Hagar. You ain't my wife. I've done you a great wrong. But you ain't my wife. I've got no wife but her."

"And what's all this been that we've lived through together, you and me? What's been the meaning of all the love and happiness we've felt for months?"

"That's nothing, Hagar. That never could have lasted. Listen. I've loved lots o' women as well as I've loved you—women in all countries and of all races — women that I've forgotten — women whose names I never knew. That's the way it is with soldier-men. You mustn't take it too much to heart."

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“And did you give them this?”

She raised her left hand and let the sunlight strike on the thin gold band around her finger.

“No, I never did. I never wronged any one that far—but you.”

“Ha! ha!” she laughed, nervously, dragging herself nearer to him and clasping her hands over his knee. “You’re joking with me. You’re so fond o’ your joke, William. And you thought I was believin’ you.”

She laughed again, but uncertainly and rather painfully.

“I’m not joking, Hagar. It don’t seem to me as if I should ever make a joke again. I’ve been a bad fellow, but I’ve never been so bad to any one as I’ve been to you.”

“You’d be good enough for me, William, even if you was ten times worse. You couldn’t commit a sin as I wouldn’t forgive. You couldn’t make a mistake as I shouldn’t find a excuse for. I don’t care how many women you’ve wronged. I don’t care if you’ve wronged me. I don’t care for nothing, so long as I have you with me—so long as we love each other in the way we’ve loved each other up to now.”

“But I’m not fit to be thought about like that, Hagar, my dear love—”

“I don’t care,” she interrupted, recklessly. “I

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don't care what you're fit for nor what you've done. I haven't loved you because I thought you the best man as ever lived. I've loved you because you was big and tall and handsome and brave and strong, and like no other man as I ever saw. What does it matter to me if you've done wrong, so long as you don't do it any more. What does it matter to me if you've broken other women's hearts, so long as you don't break mine? Let 'em weep—the other women! I hate 'em because they knew you before I knew you—because they had some o' your love before I had any—because it wasn't all kept for me. If you've betrayed 'em, I'm glad of it. Nothing matters but for you and me to live our lonely life here in this spot that hardly no one knows about, and to forget as there's a world outside."

"But my wife, Hagar?"

"I'm your wife!" she cried, leaping to her feet and confronting him with flashing eyes. "I'm your wife! You've got no wife but me."

"I have, woman, I have," he asserted, with an accent almost of anger. "I married her lawful. She's waiting for me now."

"Then let her wait. Let her die waiting. You may have married her lawful, but you've married me lawful, too. Didn't we go before the priest? Didn't we have mass? Didn't you give me a wedding-ring? Haven't I got my 'lines'? Lawful,

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you say? Ain't that lawful? And I was the second one. She was only the first—"

"But it's the first as you're bound to."

"No, William, that ain't true. It's like my father's wills. When he died they found two on 'em, but it was only the second as counted; the first was no good at all—it wasn't a will; they tore it up and burnt it. That's the law, William—my beloved, my beloved William. Don't you go for to make yourself unhappy thinking of some faded woman as has forgotten you long ago. I'm here. Think o' me. Look at me!" she cried, standing before him with outstretched arms. "Am I faded? Am I old? Am I likely to forget you? Ah, no, William. Let us both forget, but forget only the things as is past, and go on to all as lies before."

"But there's right things and wrong things, my girl. We must think o' that."

"There's only one right thing—for us to stay together. There's only one wrong thing—for us to part. Nobody needn't ever tell me anything different from that!"

He looked at her helplessly. It was so hard to make her understand. He had struck, but apparently the blow had failed to carry. Nothing like this had ever happened to him before. When he had broken with other women they had been angry, desperate, or indifferent—they had wept, they had im-

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plored, they had even laughed—but they had been convinced. The present situation was new to him, and he was puzzled as to what next to say.

“Oh, William,” she cried, suddenly, before he had time to speak, “you couldn’t leave me; you couldn’t leave me!” She flung her arms about his neck and pressed his head on her bosom. “What ’ud the world be to us now without each other?” she went on, pantingly. “We’ve grown to be like one. What’s wives and husbands to people like us, who couldn’t live if they wasn’t left together? I know you’re only joking wi’ me. I’m laughing at it. But oh, don’t joke like that any more! I ain’t used to it. It frightens me. I know I’m foolish, and that it don’t mean nothing, but it frightens me. See, see, I’m laughing. I know it’s fun, but I’m weak and tired; and when I think that I might be left here without you, William—even when I know it *couldn’t* be—I feel like a animal that’s just got a shot in the side. No, no, no!” she cried, springing from him and dashing the tears aside. “I’m not crying; I’m just laughing; you’re so fond of a joke, William, dear. Yes, it’s tears, I know, but I’m laughing just the same. It’s only that when I’m weak and tired and begin to fancy awful things as never could happen, that kind of a joke frightens me, and when I want to laugh I cry. But it don’t mean nothing. Don’t you be worried. You haven’t done nothing to hurt me,

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William. It's just your joke, and I like it. But—but—but—" She staggered and strangled in the effort to control herself. "But—but—William—that kind of a joke—"

And then she broke down. Flinging herself at his feet she wept as he had never seen a woman weep before, and so she gained her second victory. He was not only disarmed, he was unmanned. He knew of no other means of consolation than the tender words that came to him so easily.

"There, there," he said, soothingly; "there, there. Don't cry, Hagar—my sweetheart, my darling, my wife. I'll never go away from you. We'll always live here together. I won't joke like that no more. Only, for God's sake, for God's sake, don't cry!"

She sobbed herself into silence, her head resting on his knees, while he sat overcome with self-compassion.

"She'll never let me go," he said to himself. "It 'ud kill her, and I can't do that. Heavenly powers! it's queer that when a man would act right for once, the wrong as he's done won't let him. It's like being the prisoner of your own evil deeds. Something's calling me; it's driving me; it's tugging at my heart, to get me away from here; and yet she'll never let me go."

VII

"SHE'LL never let me go," he said to himself again, next morning, "and I don't seem to have the power to leave her against her will. But this idleness and emptiness 'll drive me crazy. I'd rather be a lifer in a convick settlement; for there, at any rate, there's people to look at and work to do. A woman as loves you always feels that that ought to be meat and drink and everything else in the world to you. She don't seem to think as you can want anything more or anything different. She can live on honey, and is almost vexed with you for wanting something solid. Hagar 'ud be happy all her life just to do nothing but look at me, as if I was a picter, while I shall never know a minute's peace until I go."

He sat on the shingly beach before their door and watched the sullen lifting of the ocean beneath a leaden-colored sky. She slipped silently up behind him and let her hand rest on his shoulder.

"What are you thinking of, William?" she asked, with an effort to speak lightly. Her cheek was flushed, her eye feverishly bright. Ever since their

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return from the island yesterday he had noticed in her a forced and tremulous gayety.

"I was thinking," he answered, without looking up, "as I ought to be off looking for work. My money is pretty nigh all spent, and what your father left you—"

"Will do for a good while yet," she interrupted.

"But I can't live on that. It's yourn. It's no more than enough for yourself, and won't last long, even so. People has to look ahead, Hagar. Now, if I was to go to Guysborough—"

She snatched her hand from his shoulder and moved in front of him.

"If you was to go to Guysborough you could get away from me. Is that it?"

There was something new in her tone, and though she uttered the words with a light, unnatural laugh, the change startled him.

"I don't say that," he replied, without much conviction.

"No, but you think it."

"I didn't say so."

"Not to-day, but you did yesterday."

"That was a joke. We laughed at it together."

"There's many a joke as has a streak of earnest in it. Not as I believes there is in this," she corrected, with a renewed effort to keep to the light tone she had affected. "I've been thinking o' work,

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too," she went on. "If you want to earn money, William, why can't you do as my father did. He was a woodsman, and earned plenty. All this woods is ours. There's good lumber on it, everybody says. There's pine and spruce down here by the shore, and birch and beech and maple further back. There's saw-mills at Golden Cove and ships sailing to every kind o' foreign port. That's how my father earned his living, and if you was so minded you could do the same."

The idea was new to him and not displeasing. It presented an outlet for activity. If he could not go, there might, at least, be an object for which to stay.

"I've never been back to where the hard-wood grows," he said, "Where is it?"

"It's a good mile away. All the land from here to the Cape Freels road was father's, and I suppose it's ours now. I've heard people say as it was worth a lot o' money in timber."

"Let's go back and look at it," he suggested, and in the afternoon they started.

It was a rough scramble through the pathless underbrush, and it took the heart out of him. He had been used to the life of ports and garrisons and great cities. The solitude of the forest oppressed him. The woodcraft that was part of her far-off Indian inheritance was to him as unintelligible as her joy in the sight of mere trees in leaf, with birds hop-

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ping from branch to branch, and sharp-eyed squirrels scurrying up the trunks. In the early days of his convalescence, just after his marriage to Hagar, these things had enchanted him, as a day in the country will please the dweller in the town. But now that their novelty was gone, he hated them. As she slid between the thickly growing birches, or crept beneath great fir branches sweeping to the ground, he followed heavily. It was not the sort of difficulty he was used to. The saplings she had pushed aside swung back and cut him in the face; the tangle of wild raspberry vines caught him by the feet and threw him. Long before they reached the open slope where the beeches grew he knew the wood-life was not for him. She had outdistanced him, and he could only follow by her calling. When he emerged from the thicket she was already standing under a huge beech-tree at the top of the long, gently rising knoll. She was like a young, green-clad Druidess. The breaking of the way through the wood had exhilarated her; it had heightened her color and quickened the flash of her eyes.

“He didn’t know that all this lovely woods was ours,” she had said to herself, as she slipped along. “Now he’ll have work to do, and he’ll not talk of going away no more.”

“Oh, William, ain’t it beautiful!” she cried, as he staggered through the outer rim of underbrush.

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“And it’s all ours, and more, too; this is only the beginning. The maples is further off, and they’re splendid. We’ll go on there presently.”

“Not if I know it we won’t,” he panted, as he dragged himself up the slope and threw himself down on a heap of leaves at her feet. “This is enough woods for me.”

“But you haven’t seen half on it.”

“I’ve seen more than plenty.”

“Oh, but you can’t think what the maple grove is like.”

“I don’t want to think. I don’t care if I never saw a maple grove. I don’t care if there never was a maple grove.”

“Oh, William!” she cried, reproachfully. “And you was so fond o’ the maple sugar as was made on that very spot the last spring father was alive.”

“Well, I’ve had enough of it.”

“That’s because you’ve never made it, William, sweet love,” she said, coaxingly, as she let herself slip down on the couch of leaves beside him. “That’s because you’ve never gone out in the spring, when the new life in everything is just as if the world was being made all over again. Oh, it’s so lovely! You can’t think! In winter it’s all snow. You go back into the maple grove, and the trees is standing there with the white banked up around ’em and their fine, naked branches all clear against the sky, making a pattern

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just like lace. The snow is whiter than anything you can fancy—”

“ I hate snow,” he interrupted.

“ Oh, but you wouldn't if you saw it here! It's like innocence. It's like death. It ain't like the snow as the sleighs have dragged over, and horses and men have trodden under foot. It's all stillness and smoothness and whiteness. It's only now and then that there's a track in it, so as you see that a rabbit or a squirrel or a wildcat's been by. Well, on a bright, sunny morning when early March has come, you break your way up into the maple grove. You look and look, and there's nothing. The trees is quiet and gray as if nothing could ever happen to 'em again. A few days later you come back, and still there's nothing; only the snow ain't so deep, and the sun is brighter, and there's a kind o' whisper—you can't just tell what—as seems to say that something is beginning to waken. A little later you come back again. There's big, broad leaves of the mayflower to be seen, and now and then a bit of pink-and-white bud, opening right in the very snow. Then you come up to the maples. They ain't gray any more. All their branches, and even their little twigs, is red, and you know their sap is running. Oh, William, you don't know what a joy that is! It puts new heart in you. You feel as if you could shout and sing. There's no joy like the woods' joy, William;

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except the joy of love. Then, when you come again, you bring with you pails and tins, as many as you can carry. You cut into the maple-trunk on the south side or on the west; and then out comes the sap—drop, drop, drop, just running gold. If there's a northeast wind, with frosty nights and sunny days, the sap flows as if it would never stop. Then comes the boiling and the cooling and the running into moulds, till, by-and-by, you have the beautiful, crispy cakes o' sugar. Oh, you don't know them things, William; but I'll teach you—”

“No, no!” he broke in, impatiently. “I don't want to l'arn. I ain't meant for this kind o' life, and it ain't meant for me. The woods don't mean nothing to me as they do to you. You love 'em; while to me their very shadder over me is like being buried alive.”

“Oh, don't say that, William. It hurts me as never was; it's as if you spoke hard against a person I was fond on.”

“That's because you belong here; but I belong—”

“Yes?” she asked, with parted lips, as he paused.
“Yes? You belong to where, William?”

He raised himself and looked at her steadily.

“I belong to far away from here,” he replied, as he watched her wince.

“You said you wouldn't joke like that no more.”

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"I can't help it, Hagar. I've got to say it. You've got to understand."

"What have I got to understand?"

"That all this what we've been living ain't real. It's ended. Can you take that in? It's ended. There's nothing left of it; I ought to be moving on."

"Where?" she asked, sitting up straight on the bed of leaves and leaning against the trunk of the beech-tree beneath which they sat. Her eyes grew lustreless, her expression dull. The excitement of a few minutes before died away, and in its place came the curious Indian-like impassivity before which he was ill at ease. "Where ought you to be moving on to?" she asked again.

"Home," he muttered.

"And where's home?"

"Home is where my wife is," he answered, mercilessly.

"Then that's here." There was a dogged tone in her retort; but she did not cry out as she had done yesterday.

He drew near her, and seized her hand. As he lay and looked up into her eyes, his face was contorted with mingled pity and impatience.

"You make me more brutal than I want to be, Hagar," he said, half angrily, half imploringly. "Why do you want to make a bad business worse? I've told you already that I've done you a wrong."

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I don't make no excuses. I'm ready to take any kind o' punishment as God Almighty likes to send. But I've got to break loose from you. I've got to get away from here. I ain't going to live long, Hagar. It's weeks since first I began to smell death, and that's a sign as no one is ever mistaken in. I ain't afraid of it. I've been too near it many a time already not to be used to expecting it. I've seen too many other fellers go—and worse than me, some of 'em was, too—to mind about following 'em. But before I go there's a woman as I've got to see—and she ain't you." He ended almost with a cry.

"Who is she?" Hagar asked, with a kind of stolidity.

"My God, woman!" he burst out; "do you make me say it again? She's my wife. Do you hear? Do you understand? She's my wife. Do you want me to say it any more?"

"No; you needn't say it any more," she replied, quietly. "Do you love her, William?"

"I can't say as I do," he answered, with a sudden change of tone.

"Did you ever love her?"

"Oh yes. I don't know as I ever loved any on 'em more—unless it was you, Hagar."

"What's her name?"

"Charity."

"Is she—pretty?"

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"She was. I don't suppose she is now. She ain't young any longer."

"Did you have any—children?" The question required a visible effort.

"Not as I knows of."

"How long were you married to her?"

"A matter o' three months and more."

"How long ago was that?"

"Eleven years."

"Where is she now?"

"A big ways from here—at a place called Fisher's Grant. I was on my way to her when I fell sick here."

"Did you love me, William, when you married me?"

"Oh yes."

"Much?"

"Oh yes."

"Better than any other woman as you'd loved before?"

"Yes; I'd go very near as far as to say that."

"And did you mean to stay with me always?"

"Well, I ain't much of a hand for staying in one place long."

"Then you meant to deceive me and abandon me?"

"I didn't *mean* nothing at all, Hagar. I just let things go. I saw you was crazy about me, just like a woman at Melbourne, about four or five year ago.

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So what was I to do? I was sick then, and couldn't see things right. I let you have your way, and we was married. I did what I oughtn't to've done. That's clear. That's settled. I've said it time and time again. But I understand things different now—and you ought to let me go.”

“Well, I won't keep you, William,” she said, in the same tone of impassive quietness. She rose as she spoke, and began moving slowly down the hill. “You can go whenever you like,” she flung back, indifferently, over her shoulder, “and wherever you like, and to whoever you like. You're nothing to me any more.”

She did not turn again. As he lay beneath the beech-tree he watched her slip into the undergrowth of spruce and birch and disappear.

VIII

THAT evening there was another reconciliation, but the next morning the struggle began again. After promising once more that he would never leave her, he woke to tell her that he must go. And so the days passed—now with scenes of tenderness, now with moments of coldness, now with declarations of lifelong, mutual devotion, now with asseverations that everything was at an end. But the constant repetition on his side that he must depart had its effect on hers. She grew used to the idea. It required no long time for her to accept the fact that he was with her only for a little while. She was meek, angry, piteous, jealous, indifferent by turns. She grew as changeable as he. There were periods when she spent long hours weeping in some secret woodland recess; there were others when she felt that she would be glad to have him gone.

“I can’t stand this no longer, William,” she said to him one day. “You must go.”

“You’ve said so before,” he answered; “and then you’ve repented on it.”

“But I won’t do so again,” she asserted, steadily.

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"I've no more strength. I'm heart-sore. I'm desperate. I'd be better here alone."

"Don't say that if you don't mean it, Hagar," he warned her, "for I'll go."

"I want you to go; and, much as I've loved you, I shall never call you back. It's all over. I see that now. The love ain't over—at least not mine—but the living together is. We can't do that no longer. We've lost the way of it, and once that's gone it 'll never come back again. Go, William, go. I'll not hinder you. I'll be happier to have you gone."

The very ease with which she said the words added to their bitterness. He heard them in silence, but he acted on them. When she was absent, in her long visits to the woods, he made his few preparations. Their manner towards each other grew more and more constrained until they scarcely spoke at all. It was not sullenness on either part; it was only the anguish of a situation for which neither of them had words.

"I've found out," he said to her one evening, as she returned at nightfall from spending the whole day alone in the woods—"I've found out as Jacob Eisenhauer is to touch at Golden Cove Mines tomorrow, on his way from Louisburg."

She lifted to him a face full of silent questioning.

"He's bound for Shelburne. It seems to me I might as well go along o' him."

"Very well, William," she said, with an effort.

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“He’d have to pick me up at Hungry Island.”

She made no reply.

“But I’d have no way o’ getting word to him, unless you’d be willing to walk round to Golden Cove and have a message sent to him at the Mines.”

Still she made no reply.

“We’d row over to the island early in the morning,” he explained, “so as you could bring the boat back. Then, if you was to start for Golden Cove at once, you’d get there by twelve. Jimmy Preeper ’ud telegraph to the Mines for you, where Jacob’s expected to arrive in the course o’ the afternoon. He’ll put out again in the evening, so that the message ’ud just catch him. It ’ud be morning before he got along by Hungry Island, and then he could send and fetch me off. I could take water and victuals enough for the day; and I shouldn’t mind camping out that one night, if it didn’t rain.”

“Very well,” she assented, with the same impassivity; “I’ll go.”

Then she turned and left him.

In the morning there was no change in her manner; there was not a quiver on her lip nor a tear in her eye. They rose with the August sunrise; and nothing but her Indian-like lack of all expression hinted that the day for her was different from other days. When her gaze fell on the small red bundle in which William Pennland had brought his worldly possessions to the

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Old Shore road, and was now taking them away, it was absolutely stony. She sat in a corner and watched him as he prepared and ate his breakfast, but she took no part with him. She saw him put some water and spirits in a bottle, and arrange a package of food, but she offered no assistance. She sat and stared silently, as when Jonas Boutillier had spent the night there. Now and then Pennland spoke, not because he had anything to say, but because he could not bear the agony of the silence. She answered in monosyllables or did not answer at all. The sun was not yet high when all was ready.

“We might as well go now,” he said, with an embarrassed air.

She rose without a word, and they walked down the shingly beach together. She stood looking on as he pushed the boat into the water and stowed his bundle in the bow.

“I’ll row this time,” he said. “You jump in and sit in the stern.”

She obeyed him silently. When she had taken her seat he pushed the boat off and sprang in. Seizing the oars, he rowed quickly and strongly. He was eager to get the last painful moments over—as, on such occasions, he had always been. Hagar did not look at him. Her eyes were fixed in dull gaze on the dancing waters, but her mind was not at work. She seemed to have lost the capacity to realize that they

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were passing their last moments together. In less than an hour the bow of the boat grated on the shore, and she woke from her stupor with surprise.

"We're there, Hagar," he cried, in painful sharpness of tone. In another second he had sprung out.

She rose from her place and, taking one of the oars he had abandoned, made ready to thrust off again.

"Ain't you going to get out?" he asked, with the same quavering sharpness in his voice.

"What for?" she returned. "I must hurry back again, to go to Golden Cove."

He had no answer to make to this, and so stood looking at her stupidly. The blood surged into his face and made him crimson. The veins in his neck and forehead swelled. He was visibly trembling while she stood unmoved.

"Good-bye, Hagar," he said, hoarsely.

"Good-bye," she returned, as she bent on the oar to push away.

"No, wait," he cried, seizing the prow of the boat and detaining it. "I want to ask you something. You're willing to have me go, ain't you?"

"Yes, I'm willing."

"And glad, too, ain't you?"

"Yes, I'm glad."

"And you forgive me?"

"No, I don't feel no call to forgive you. If I could do you harm, I'd do it. There never was a

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Levanti yet as 'ud go wi'out his revenge if he could take it."

"But don't you love me any more?"

"No one but a coward 'ud ask a question like that," she flashed back at him fiercely. "What do you want me to love you for? But since you do, I'll say it. Yes, I love you," she flung at him, as though it were an insult. "God help me, I love you still. I shall always love you. A woman like me don't give her love and take it back just because she wants to. I do love you; God pity me for it! Now I'll go."

With a quick thrust of the oar into the sand she forced the boat out into the open. It was only a second, but already they had begun to part. She stood still in her place, he in his. Each gazed into the other's eyes in mute farewell. No words were possible, as no embrace had been possible. On the lifting wavelets the boat drifted farther and farther away from land. In a minute or two the distance between them was so great that their eyes could no longer meet. Then Hagar sat down and began to row.

She rowed firmly and strongly. The boat seemed fairly to leap away from the island. William stood as she left him on the shore, but she could not see his face. His very form soon became only a blurred spot against the background of rock and stunted spruce. Not for an instant did she take her gaze

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from him, but not for an instant did she slacken her long, sweeping stroke. The island dwindled behind the waves; and all at once she realized that William could not be seen. She stopped rowing, and strained her sight, but it was in vain. She stood up in the boat to increase her view, but it was equally in vain. They were parted. He had gone. He had gone.

She let herself sink into the seat again. The oars dragged in the rowlocks, while the boat tilted and tossed on the tide. She sat with face bowed down, and arms clasped about her knees in the attitude of grieving, savage things, too primitive to think of grace.

Suddenly she lifted her head and uttered one loud cry of pain—a cry that seemed to ring out over the lonesome reaches of the sea. It was her only protest. Then she took the oars again and began to row.

IX

NEARLY a week later came the August storm, and "the back of the summer was broken." Nearly a week later still, Charity Pennland and Jonas Boutilier arrived at Mrs. Betsy Music's farm on Portuguese Point. They had come by schooner from Fisher's Grant to Halifax. There they had found another schooner, which had brought them as far as the French Acadian settlement of Saint Eulalie. The remaining fifteen miles they had done on foot.

"We'll lay at Betsy's for the last night," Jonas had explained when he mapped out the journey. "Then it 'll be an easy matter to row across cove next day, and take the Old Shore road. If anything was to go wrong, we could go back to Betsy's."

Charity hesitated.

"I don't want to thrust myself upon your sister," she objected.

"You wouldn't be doing that, ma'am," Jonas replied. "Betsy's used to takin' people in sudden. She've got a room o' purpose. She's a dreadful pleasant woman, too, Betsy is."

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“And I don’t want to force her to share my trouble,” Charity pursued.

“Oh, she’d like it,” Jonas answered, promptly. “Betsy’s never happy unless she sees people in trouble. She goes miles to find ’em, and then she just takes and mothers ’em. She’s had so much trouble of her own that it don’t hardly make her sorry. She’s got used to it; and she has a way o’ makin’ other people used to it, too. She’s terrible kind-’earted.”

Charity found it so. Her arrival brought just the sort of excitement Mrs. Music loved. It was long since there had been a death or a bad case of sickness in the settlement; and since Peter Greenfield had been lost at sea, and had ceased to beat his wife, there had not been even that ill-used female to console. Mrs. Music had begun to feel her powers of comfort running to waste, when Jonas appeared with Charity.

“You couldn’t ha’ been welcomer, dear, if you’d been my very own,” she said, next morning, when Charity had apologized for the trouble she had been obliged to give.

They were making an early start in order to reach the Old Shore road by the beginning of the afternoon.

“I’m sure I’d ha’ been only too glad if you could ha’ stayed longer,” she continued, as they

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crossed the wood-yard. "But I know as you won't be easy till you gets to your journey's end. We'll just take this short cut, Jonas, through the orchard; and by the time we reaches the shore Thankful will ha' brought the boat round from the boat-house."

"Them's nice currants," Jonas observed, as they entered the kitchen garden—"black, white, and red. We don't see many o' that kind o' fruit at Fisher's Grant, do we, Mrs. Pennland? Them's healthy-look-in' cabbages, too, Betsy. You seem to've had good luck this year."

"Yes, brother; all the crops is doin' splendid, and it's been a good year for pertaters."

"I see you've dug a good many," Jonas remarked, as they passed farther on.

"Only the Early Roses. The Bluenoses is still in the ground. I ain't going to have a pertater frolic this year. 'Twouldn't be just the thing, and Solomon so lately departed. I sha'n't have it said on the P'int as I didn't mourn him. I remember you, dear, when you was a little un," Mrs. Music went on, turning towards Charity. "A pretty child you was when Cap'n Byfleet first brought you to Fisher's Grant—not but what you're pretty now, and you must be getting up in years."

"Thirty-four, ma'am," Charity murmured.

"Only? Anybody 'ud give you more; though

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you've kep' your looks awful well; haven't she, Jonas?"

Jonas assented with enthusiasm; and Charity, in spite of the heavy weight at her heart, was guilty of a blush.

"And you've had a deal o' worry, too," Mrs. Music went on. "Well, I can feel for you, dear. No one can't say as I haven't had my share; but I always believed as the Lord 'ud show me a way out, and so He has."

To this allusion to the late Mr. Music, Charity found it difficult to respond with tact; so she could only glance at her hostess with an expression of sympathetic comprehension.

Mrs. Music was a stout, motherly woman, some years her brother's senior. She resembled him in the kindly snap of her bright, black eyes, and the beaming smile that softened her weather-beaten features. Anybody could see that she had worked hard; but it was also plain that a bustling, energetic goodness had helped her to rise above the ordinary ills of life. In her new widow's weeds she walked rather heavily, rolling slowly from side to side, like a ship in a choppy sea.

"You've a powerful sight o' cherries this year, Betsy," Jonas commented, glancing about him like a black-eyed bird. "This is the orchard we're comin' to now, Mrs. Pennland. It's genteel, ain't it? Them

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blackhearts is almost as dark as plums—and a nicer-tastin' cherry than the blackheart you'll hardly find, go where you may. The snow apples ain't partic'lar plenty this season, Betsy. I've seen 'em some years cluster on the branches so as the trees was nearly red wi' 'em."

"It ain't a good apple year," Mrs. Music admitted; "though them Gravensteins and the Ribstone Pippins, over yonder, is doin' pretty well. But we sha'n't ship as many barrels on 'em to Golden Cove as we've done the last season or two. I hope pore Solomon don't know it, where he's gone. It 'ud ha' fretted him terrible if he was here now. He was always so worried when there was a bad apple year. I'm sure it's a mercy when people is took before they can know the evil as can happen to 'em."

"He's left you well provided for, anyhow, Betsy. Whatever else can be said against Solomon, nobody can't say as his death wasn't a blessin' to his family. If he made 'em work hard, and live on next to nothing when he was here, they found the good on it when he was gone."

"Oh, I'm not complainin', brother," Mrs. Music sighed. "There's been worse husbands than Solomon—plenty on 'em. He'd hardly allow hisself a night to rest nor a day to be sick in; and if he didn't spare others, he didn't spare hisself. No, I'm not complainin'," she repeated, with another sigh.

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“Everything has worked for good, as I always believed it would. And now if Thankful don’t marry a woman as I couldn’t get on with, and Hennery is protected on the Banks, I shall be finding the good of all I’ve been through. I was always a great hand to trust, Mrs. Pennland, and it’s helped me wonderful. When we heard in the sermon two Sundays ago as how the righteous was rewarded for their faith, I took them words straight ’ome. I said, ‘That’s me,’ and almost anybody could ha’ hearn me say it. And what I advise you, dear, is to trust, too. You’ll find the good on it, as sure as my name is what it is.”

“But I did trust!” Charity said, in trembling self-defence. “I did trust, Mrs. Music, and it’s only brought me to what I have to do to-day. I try to keep my faith from breaking down, but it ain’t easy. The Lord hasn’t acted with me as I expected Him to do.”

“Oh, but you can’t make a contract wi’ Him as if He was a carpenter,” Jonas argued. “You can’t say, If you does a given job in a given time, I’ll own up as you’re not a raskill. That ain’t religion.”

“When it comes to trustening, dear,” Mrs. Music said, gently, “you must just do as the Scriptur’ tells us, and tarry the Lord’s leisure and be strong. Them’s always been favorite words o’ mine; and I seem to’ve found out as how the Lord’s leisure is quicker than other people’s haste. You can’t hurry

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Him no more than you can hurry the weather; and they both does good if you lets 'em take their time. There's folks as 'ud stop the wind from blowin' so as not to have any windfalls in the fruit; and so they'd lose the good o' the fresh air. There's others as thinks that if they only begins to plant winter 'll have to go; and so they spiles their crops. And it's that way, too, wi' trusting. To get the good on it you've got to be patient and to keep it up and wait. Them as does so is never disapp'inted."

"But I am disapp'inted," Charity protested, almost with a sob. "You know what my trouble is. Well, it ain't anything as can ever be put right again. When the pitcher is broken at the fountain, nothing 'll mend it."

"Oh yes," said Jonas, readily; "there's glue, and the Lord has plenty on it."

"You see, dear," Mrs. Music reasoned, following up her brother's metaphor, "most of our lives has to be patched up in one way or t'other. I'll allow as it's not as good as if the pitcher hadn't been broken at all; but it's something that it can be made to hold together. Your life ain't sp'iled. Don't you go for to believe it. There's lots left for you to do."

"But what?" Charity asked, with the air of throwing a challenge.

"You'll find that out when you and him's together."

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“But I don’t know what to say to him.”

“It ’ll be given you in that same hour, as the Scriptur’s say,” Mrs. Music answered, promptly. “I wouldn’t worry about it at all, if I was you. I’ve never seen a good wife yet as wasn’t lit with the tongue o’ fire when the moment had come for her to speak.”

“I’m not used to such things,” Charity complained, overcome by a sense of her own weakness for the task before her. “I’ve travelled all this long distance into a strange country, and now that I’m here I don’t know what I’ve come for or what I ought to do.”

“You’ll know that by your own feelings, dear. You haven’t got to think of it at all. It ’ll be made that clear to you as you won’t be in any doubt. The chief dooty for a wife is to be there, right on the spot. She’s got to be there, and she’s got to set there, and she’s got to set there steady. One wife has more power over a man than ten women that ain’t his wife, be they clever as witches. But she has to know her strength and to use it constant. A woman as is weak with a man has as good as lost him.”

“That’s the way it was with my two,” Jonas said, for Charity’s encouragement. “They sot hard, but they sot well. When they was around, I couldn’t hardly call my soul my own. They kind o’ broke my sperrit, so as I’ve never been the same man since.

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“ And as for this husband o’ yourn—you just go there and set and set and trust to the Lord and don’t yield to no one, and he’ll give way; he’ll give way, even if he’s taken root as deep and firm as a oak-tree.”

“ But there’ll be—her,” Charity said, with a blush redder than that of the snow-apples overhead. “ She’ll be there. I might be able to deal with him; but I’m afraid o’ the like o’ her. She ain’t a good woman, and I’ve never had to do with any other kind.”

They emerged from the orchard, and stood for a minute looking down over the farm as it sloped gently towards the waters of the cove. At any other time Charity would have found pleasure in the fields of yellowing grain, the turnips, the beets, and the meadows of timothy and clover. She would have said that it was a country that the Lord had blessed, and very different from her own sparsely covered uplands. But she had no time for such thoughts now; for Jonas pointed to a great headland rising abruptly from the sea, and said, “ That’s Cape Freels.” Charity’s heart gave a sudden bound. It was almost as if he had said, “ That’s William Pennland.” She had entered into the land that William’s eyes were looking on. It made him seem very near.

“ That’s Hungry Island,” Jonas continued, pointing towards the south; “ and that low patch o’ wood, t’other side o’ the cove and just below Cape Freels, is Michael Levanti’s. The Old Shore road runs along

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its sea-front, though you can't see it from so far away as this."

Charity gazed with fascinated eyes. Here, then, was the enchanted spot where her husband was held a captive! Here was the Klingsor's garden, where flower-like maidens blossomed for temptation! Here was the wild coast on which Pallas Athene had made one last effort to throw the homeward-bound Ulysses! For the minute William took a second place in her mind; she was thinking most of the woman who had beguiled him. Up to the present her conception of Hagar had been that of a vague, evil figure in the background; but the nearer Charity came to her journey's end the more clearly did "the strange woman" emerge to the forefront of the scene. It was not till this morning that she had consciously shrunk from meeting her.

"I wouldn't go for to put her down as not a good woman, dear," Mrs. Music said, softly, breaking a brief silence.

"But she ain't a good woman," Charity insisted. "She can't be."

"Well, of course," Mrs. Music reasoned, as they began to move down the slope towards the water, "there's none on us good; and yet, again, there's none on us bad—that's to say, not downright, out-and-out *bad*. I've knowed plenty as seemed so when you looked at 'em from a distance; but near to, and

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man to man, so to speak, there was generally some kind o' salt as kep' 'em from being worthless. I've given over calling people bad. I leaves that to Him who knows how to judge 'em for what they've done, and I ain't in a hurry to hear the partic'lars. Now, there's this young crittur. Things looks against her, I'll allow, but who knows. She may just ha' been mistaken. Or, again, she mightn't know no better. Or, still again, she mightn't never ha' hearn tell as William Pennland was your man at all."

"That's just what I said," Jonas interposed. "You and me thinks alike about a good many things, Betsy."

"Oh no, Mrs. Music," Charity said, with a faint, incredulous smile. "William 'ud never have wronged her so much as not to tell her that."

"Men is pore hands at sayin' the right thing at the right time, dear. 'Tain't that they want to deceive, so much as they just lets things go. They generally talk when they ought to keep quiet, and when you expects a word from 'em they act as if they was tongue-tied. None on 'em as I ever knowed had any kind o' gift, except for trying a woman's patience."

"It's strange as the women is so fond on 'em, then," Jonas ventured.

"Oh, the pore women, God help 'em!" Mrs. Music exclaimed. "They've always got a weakness for the pore and the maimed and the halt and the blind; and

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I've never seen a man as wasn't one or t'other—inside if not out. And as for these sinners as you've got on your hands, Mrs. Pennland, you'll have to be patient wi' 'em—”

“ I could be patient with *him*—” Charity began.

“ And wi' her, too, dear. She'll need it, I expects; for, from all I've hearn tell, she's a dreamy, queer, fanciful crittur, as her mother was afore her.”

“ You knew her mother?” Charity inquired, with surprise.

“ Hagar White? Well, I should think I did know her, dear. Her and me was the first two on the P'int to leave off the crinoline when it went out o' style. We felt dreadful sheepish, we did, wi' our petticoats wagglin' round our feet; and they cried after us in the roads as we was ondecent. But we kep' it up, knowin' it to be the fashion, and shortly after that she off and runs away wi' Michael Levanti, as was only a hand on her father's farm and a Catholic, too. It was a awful disgrace to the Whites, and between that and the shingles her mother never got over it, but died the next year. And yet Hagar White had her good p'int. She had the handsomest voice for singin' I ever laid eyes on, and we missed her dreadful from the choir after she'd run away. She writ poetry, too, and was a great hand wi' apple cider. A nice-looking girl she was, pretty-complected and wi' blue eyes—”

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“And the takesomest foot and figger as I’ve ever seen,” said Jonas. “Unless it was yourn, ma’am,” he added, as an after-thought.

As they neared the shore Charity’s distress increased. She sighed heavily, and now and then a tear, that no biting of the lip would suppress, forced its way down her cheek.

“Oh, dear,” she groaned, when they caught sight of Thankful Music bringing round the boat—“oh, dear, I feel so helpless! I never supposed it would be so hard. I can’t tell whatever I shall do with them when I get there.”

“’Tain’t what you’re to do wi’ ’em is the question,” Mrs. Music explained, briskly; “it’s what they’re to do wi’ you. All you’ve got to do is just to set there. They’ll have to do the talking and the excusing and argifyng. Your presence, as William Pennland’s lawful wedded wife, will be all you need.”

“What a lot o’ sense you have, Mrs. Music,” Charity said, tearfully.

“Well, there ain’t many things, dear, as I haven’t thought out; and if I knows a little bit more than most, it’s nothing to be proud on. It’s only that the Lord has given me a gift or two out o’ the common, and I just take it humble.”

“I wish you’d come with me,” Charity urged. “I’d be stronger if you was by.”

“No, dear, no. You feel timid like, because you’re

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overwrought at the thought of seein' him as you've been fond on. But you won't want no strangers to carry you through the errand on which you're bent. It 'll all come simple and natrel, even if it won't be easy. Now, this is what I've planned out. I'll go over wi' you to t'other side o' cove. Then Thankful and me 'll make a bit o' something to eat and drink. After that you and Jonas 'll set off. When you gets near the cottage, Jonas 'll stay behind, and you'll go on alone. Don't you be fearsome, dear. The Lord and His angels 'll be with you, and there'll be nothing to be scared on."

"And I'll not be far away, ma'am," Jonas added. "Betsy's in the right on it. When you go up to that door and knock, you've got to be alone. Anybody with you 'ud be a weakness rather than a help. But I'll be near, and if things was to go amiss I could be called on."

"And what I hope is this," Mrs. Music continued, "that you and your William 'll come away together, and take the boat wi' Thankful and return right here. Then Jonas and me 'll try to see what can be done wi' the pore, lorn crittur of a girl. If it wasn't for throwing her in Thankful's way, I'd bring her home with me after a spell—that is, when you and your man 'ud be gone. But we must let them things work their own way out. Here we be at the boat. Just pull her up a bit higher on the skids, Thankful, so as

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Mrs. Pennland and me sha'n't get our skirts wet! Jonas, give Mrs. Pennland a hand. There, dear, there; set right down in the stern. I'll come beside you and steer. Mercy me, Thankful!" she cried, as she lurched over the thwarts, "don't shove her off afore I've got sot. Anybody 'ud think it was a regatta by the hurry you're in. Now, Jonas, you can get in and take the stroke. We're settled now, Thankful. Don't get your feet wet when you shove her off. There," she cried again, as Thankful sprang in, "I knowed you'd do it. Your left foot is soakin'. Anybody can see as you're a farmer. You'll never get used to the water no more nor a pea-fowl. Well, we're off, anyhow. For goodness sake, Thankful, don't drench us wi' salt water every time you take a stroke—and us in black, too. Row quieter, can't you? Look at your uncle Jonas; he don't make no more of a splash than if he was stirrin' porridge."

And so under Mrs. Music's captaincy they floated out into the blue waters of the cove. Charity sat with eyes fixed on the wooded shore to which they were advancing. She was afraid of it, as primitive creatures are of a demon-haunted land. She strained her vision into it, like a soul crossing the Styx, and striving to catch the first clear glimpse of the life on the other side.

X

WHEN Charity turned from Jonas to go on alone she nerved herself for the work that was to be done. As long as there had been an arm to support her she had leaned on it. Now, thrown upon herself, something of her habitual courage came back to her.

“Don’t you be afeard, ma’am,” were Jonas’s parting words. “It ain’t far, and I’ll bide here till I get some kind o’ sign from you. As soon as you pass that bend in the road the cottage ’ll be in sight. Keep up your ’eart, and mind Betsy’s words, as how the Lord and His angels ’ll be wi’ you.”

She pressed his hand silently and went on. She walked slowly, looking towards the bend in the road, and expecting every moment that William Pennland or Hagar Levanti would come round it.

“Oh, Lord, give me strength! Oh, Lord, give me strength!” she prayed, repeating the words mechanically.

When at the turn of the way the cottage showed itself under two tall pines, she stopped an instant to recover from the shock of her emotion. It was a relief to her that there was no one to be seen. The house looked poorer and lonelier than she had pictured it;

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while the sea, rolling up almost to the threshold, lent to the spot an air of oppressive desolation. She went on again, keeping as much as possible in the shadow of the trees around her. Presently she emerged into a kind of clearing, where the trees afforded her no more protection, and she stopped again. Around the house there was nothing but an irregular, unkempt grass-plot. The wood began a few paces behind; while in front there was only the rough roadway straggling along the shore. For an instant she shrank back. She was in full view from the cottage, and knew she could be watched as she advanced. At first there was no sign of life anywhere. The house seemed untenanted. Then a face appeared at a window. Charity knew that some one's eyes were on her, and urged herself to go forward. "Is it William?" she asked; but she was too far away to tell. The face remained at the window, watching steadily. Charity fixed her eyes on it and moved more rapidly. She was eager to discern the watcher's features; but before she could do so the face suddenly disappeared. Again there was no sign of life anywhere. The wind soughed through the pines and the sea thundered heavily on the shore; out of the cottage there came neither sound nor movement.

But when Charity arrived before the door it was opened instantly. On the threshold stood a slender girl dressed in coarse, dull green.

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"Be you Hagar Levanti?" Charity asked, at once.

The question was needless, for the skin that suggested beaten gold, and the eyes that were purple-black like pansies, had answered it beforehand.

"Yes," said the girl, impassively, "I be. I'm Hagar Levanti, and you're the other woman."

"What other woman?" Charity inquired. She thought the reply would give her an opening through which to put forth her claim.

"You don't need tellin'," the girl said, still impassively. "You've come o' purpose. I've been expectin' on you. Ever since the peddler-man passed by there's been evil brewin', and now it's here. Come in, woman; come in."

She threw the door wide open, and turned. Charity followed her into a room poorly furnished and in disorder.

"There he is," said the girl, stopping suddenly. She pointed to a doorway, through which Charity could see into another room.

"Who?" Charity asked, half terrified.

"Him," replied the girl. "Him as you've come to see. He's my husband. Go and look at him."

Charity hesitated.

"Is it—William?"

"Go and see," the girl said again; and Charity went.

She peered into the room, and, by the dim light

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from a darkened window, she saw a bed in which lay a man apparently sleeping. Charity approached on tiptoe. The man was breathing heavily, but he did not stir. She bent and looked into his face; it seemed to her the face of a stranger. Hagar had crept into the room behind her, and Charity, raising herself, looked at the girl with an expression of questioning.

“Who is it?” she whispered.

“Don’t you know him, woman?” the girl whispered, hoarsely, in return. “It’s William Penn—him whose proper name was William Pennland.”

“Oh, my God!” Charity groaned, falling on her knees beside the bed. “It ain’t him. It can’t be him.”

“It is, woman. You don’t know him because he’s so sunken and hollow-cheeked and starved like. He’s got a beard, too—a fortnight’s growth. He didn’t look like that when you knowed him, did he? No, nor when I knowed him, neither. He didn’t look like that two weeks ago. It’s all come lately—”

“But how?”

“Oh, he’s been sick. He ain’t been a well man for a long spell back, and these last few days he’s fallen away dreadful. He’s been fretted and worried and afraid you’d be comin’ after him. He thought he’d wronged you by makin’ you think as he’d married you, years and years ago. It worked on his mind, like—”

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“ But he did marry me.”

“ Maybe, woman; but it didn’t last. It was over very quick. He told me so. Since then he’s married me. I’m his wife.”

Charity rose from her knees, trembling but determined.

“ You can’t be his wife,” she said; “ he can’t ha’ had any wife but me.”

“ Have you got your marriage lines?” the girl asked, promptly.

“ N—no,” Charity answered; “ that is, I did have ’em, but—”

“ There’s mine,” said Hagar, proudly, drawing a paper from her bosom. “ It’s writ there for any one to read that William Pennland, bachelor, and Hagar Levanti, spinster, is lawful man and wife. Can you read, woman? Look!”

She unfolded the paper and held it under Charity’s eyes. In the dim light the words were legible here and there.

“ I did have mine—” Charity began again.

“ Have you got your wedding - ring?” the girl asked, seizing Charity’s left hand.

“ Not here; but—”

“ When a woman hasn’t got her wedding - ring *here*,” Hagar broke in, disdainfully, “ she hasn’t got none at all. There’s mine,” she added, extending her hand. “ You ain’t his wife, woman. You ain’t his

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wife. If he's got any wife at all, it's me. It's me!" she cried, her voice rising, "it's me! it's me! You might as well go away again. It's me! it's me!"

"Hush!" Charity whispered. "You'll wake him."

"No, no, woman. He won't wake. He's been that way since yesterday. I don't believe he'll ever wake no more."

Charity turned sharply towards the bed and pulled back the curtain at the window. In the full afternoon light the sleeper's features were more distinct. She bent and studied them. Little by little recognition came to her, as it might have come to Dante when the eyes of former friends looked at him from the Inferno. Beyond the thin, drawn, sharp-featured face on the pillow she began to see that of the man she had loved when it was fresh and young and rosy. Across the forehead there was even the slanting bit that the forage-cap had kept white when all the rest was sun-tanned.

"Yes," she said, aloud. "It's William, and he's—dyin'."

"Yes," echoed the girl behind her, "he's dyin'."

"And haven't you done nothing for him?" Charity cried, suddenly, raising herself from her bent posture and turning to confront Hagar. "Haven't you done nothing for him?"

"What could I do?" the girl returned, stolidly.

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"He was sick; and then little by little he got this way. I couldn't stop him."

"But haven't you had a doctor?"

"There ain't a doctor nearer than Golden Cove, and I couldn't leave him to go so far."

"Then you've killed him," Charity said, quietly.

Hagar made no reply, but, turning, left the room. Charity felt his heart and pulse, and laid her hand on his temples.

"He's beyond me," she said, when she had felt his heart again and listened to his breathing. "It's lungs, and—something else, I don't know what. Lungs wouldn't ha' made him so terrible pinched and feeble. If a doctor don't come soon he'll not live the night out."

She moistened his lips with brandy that she found on a table by the bed, and drew the coverlet carefully around him. He continued to breathe painfully, but did not move. For an instant she had the thought of stooping to kiss him on the forehead; but in the very act she drew back again.

"No," she said. "He ain't mine. He's given himself away. I'll not steal what I have the right to lawful."

Going into the outer room, she found Hagar sitting bolt upright, her black apron thrown back over her head. She was like the veiled personification of despair.

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“I’m going out,” Charity said. “I’m going to send for a doctor. I sha’n’t be long, but you’ll have to watch him while I’m away.”

Hagar neither stirred nor answered, and Charity hurried off. She ran down the road to find Jonas, who, as he saw her coming, hastened to meet her.

“He’s sick. He’s dyin’, Jonas,” Charity called, when she was near enough to speak. “For God’s sake, go back to Mrs. Music and ask her to come to me. If you know of any doctor—”

“There’s Dr. Grigg over at the P’int, ma’am,” Jonas explained. “He ain’t got any roof to his mouth, but he’s a good doctor, folks says. Me and Thankful will go and fetch him, while Betsy comes to you.”

So it was settled, and Charity hurried back. In passing through the outer room she saw Hagar still sitting with covered face as she had left her. In the bedroom the sick man lay unchanged. Charity moistened his lips once more with brandy, and adjusted the coverlet again. It was all she could do; and so she took a chair and sat down at the bedside.

“And this is him!” she said to herself, with a soft moan. “This is him as I’ve watched and waited for all these years; and now that I’ve found him he don’t seem nothing to me any longer. What’s the meaning of it? I know it’s William Pennland, but I don’t seem to feel as it’s the man I’ve loved. Is it the long

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absence as has made the difference? Can it be that even if he'd come back to me, him and me could never have taken up our life together again. Has the man I've been carrying in my heart been nothing but a shadow as I've wove out o' my own dreams? And is this the real one? Oh, my God! but this is the hardest thing of all—to've found him, and to see as he's not what I've been lookin' for."

She leaned forward and gazed at him more closely.

"And yet it's him," she went on; "it's him. A month ago I should almost ha' dropped dead for joy just at the thought of seeing him. And now he's here, wi' only an hour or two to stay perhaps, and I don't feel nothing at all. Oh, what kind o' woman am I? He's dyin'; and I, as have worshipped him, can't hardly feel it grief to let him go."

She put out her hand and timidly brushed back the curls from his forehead.

"There's a white streak. He didn't have that before. There's more gray, too, round the temples. I never thought as he could grow old. I never expected as he'd fall away and change like this. But it can't be for that reason as I don't seem to love him any more. Age and sickness would never ha' made any difference in my love. It's her," she said, vehemently and almost aloud. "It's her. She robbed me not only o' the love he had for me, but of what I had for him."

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She rose from the bedside and went out into the other room. Hagar was still sitting bolt upright, motionless, with the black apron thrown back over her head. Charity came and stood before her. At the rustle of the skirts near her Hagar stirred and clasped her hands convulsively.

“Well may you cover your face, you wicked woman!” Charity cried, harshly. “If I had done what you’ve done I’d count it a mercy if God ’ud strike me blind. I should never see a man without thinking o’ him I’d killed. I should never see a woman without remembering her whose heart I’d broken.”

Hagar snatched the apron from her face and looked up at Charity with a flash of fierceness.

“Ain’t my heart broken, too?” she exclaimed. “What can you know o’ hearts?—you an old woman, and a woman as wasn’t able to keep his love, not even when you was young. Don’t come here talking to me o’ hearts when I’ve fairly thrown mine before him, just to have him trample it underfoot. Who says I killed him? Even if I’d done it, it ’ud ha’ been no more nor just, for he’s treated me cruel bad. When God comes to judge the world, ’taint me as ’ll be to blame.”

“But he’s dyin’ now,” Charity said, with a sudden change of tone. For the first time the thought came to her that the sin might not have been all on “the

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strange woman's" side. She was not used to anger, and could not persist in it for long. "He's dyin' now," she repeated; "and if he's done wrong we ought to pardon him."

"That's easy talk for you, as have got little to pardon. It's different wi' me. I don't feel no call to pardon him, not if he was to come creepin' to my feet. But he'll never come—not now, he won't. You and me needn't have no dispute over what's taken from us both. Oh, God, let me die, too!" she burst out, with sudden anguish; "let me die, too!"

She threw back the apron over her head again, and stifled her tearless cries. Charity turned from her and went back once more to the bedside. She was perplexed by this new element in the drama. That a bad woman could suffer like a good one was a possibility which had not occurred to her.

Studying again the face of the man before her she tried to reconstruct her dream; but it would not come back. "This is him; this is him," she kept saying to herself, but without conviction. "This is him I married. This is him who sailed away from me. This is him as I've prayed for the return of. He's here before me. I've seen him at last. The Lord has granted me my heart's desire. He's been very merciful—I suppose. I ought to be thankful. He might ha' died before I'd come. He might ha' died and been buried before I'd ever heard as he'd been here.

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I've seen him, and that's something. I'll be easier now. When I go back home I sha'n't have anything to fret over nor to look for nor to pray about. I'll know where he is. I'll know as he'll never come back. I'll know as I've only loved a shadder, and that he never loved me at all. I'll know all that—and I ought to be contented. But I ain't contented. There's something gone as I'll miss the hope of, and I'll never have nothing to hold by any more."

So in bitter reflection an hour went by.

Hagar remained silent in the outer room. The sick man drew rasping, painful breaths, ceasing now and then, for a few seconds at a time, to breathe at all. Charity watched him with nervous, strained attention. All at once, when she was not expecting it, he heaved one long, sob-like sigh, and died.

"Hagar! Hagar!" Charity cried, springing to her feet, "he's gone!"

There was no response from the outer room. With a dull thud Hagar fell senseless to the floor.

"Dear heart alive!" Mrs. Music exclaimed, bustling through the doorway. "Why, what's this? Somebody fainted? Are you there, Mrs. Pennland?"

Pale but controlled, Charity came from the inner room.

"My husband's just gone, Mrs. Music," she said, with calmness. "God has shown me the mercy to let me close his eyes when he passed away."

XI

It was in just such a situation as this that Mrs. Music was at her best. She knew exactly what to do. She saw at a glance that Charity would be kept from breaking down by being occupied. She saw some other things besides.

"You 'tend to her, poor soul!" she said, when Hagar had come back to consciousness, "and I'll see to the layin' out."

"I ought to do that," Charity objected. "He was my husband, and no one but me ought to do for him what must be done at the last."

"Don't leave me, woman, don't leave me," Hagar cried, clinging convulsively to Charity. "Let be. Let her lay him out. Stay wi' me. I can't be left alone."

"She's right, dear," Mrs. Music insisted. "She's got to be took care of; and there's only you to do it. Ain't there another room somewhere, so as she could lay down?"

"There's the attic," Hagar murmured, faintly.

"There's a bed in it. Take me there."

They carried, rather than led, her up the short,

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steep stairway, and Mrs. Music left them to themselves. The room, with its slanting roof and tiny window, was poor and bare. It had been Hagar's in former years. Now she threw herself down on the rough little truckle-bed, moaning and hiding her face in the pillow, as she had often done in times of fear or sorrow, when she was a child. Charity sat down beside her and did her best to soothe her.

"Oh, you needn't tell me as it can be borne," the girl burst out, in grief that was tinged with anger. "It can't be borne. It's easy for the like o' you to talk. He'd given you up long ago. You've got used to it. You haven't had him to look at and serve and worship, day and night, for months past. He wasn't your husband any longer. You can't feel as I do. I was his wife. You've forgotten what that means—"

"No, I haven't," Charity broke in, with sudden jealousy. "You mustn't say that. It ain't true. I was his wife. I'll never allow no one to say different to that."

"It's a lie," the girl screamed. "I was his wife. I'm his widder. I'm Hagar Penn. When my baby's born it 'll be William Penn's lawful child."

Charity rose hastily from the bedside. Here was something she had not suspected and could not endure. But the girl began to scream hysterically and toss violently on the couch. Charity sat down again, and took Hagar's hands in her own. In spite of her-

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self she could not see suffering without making the effort to comfort it.

"The child 'll be lawful!" the girl cried, wildly, crushing Charity's hands in her grasp. "It 'll be lawful. Say it will. Tell me it will."

"I can't say it," Charity stammered. "But it 'll do you harm to take on so."

"How can I help takin' on when he's dead? He's dead!—him as was so strong and able. Nobody needn't say I killed him. I tried to save him, but I couldn't do no good. It was too late. I didn't know how. Now he'll never speak to me no more. O God! O God! How am I to live on and bring a baby into the world? But it 'll be a lawful baby. Say it will, woman. Say it, or go away from here."

But Charity could not say it. She murmured other soothing words, but she would not utter that one which alone could have given consolation.

"I can't say it, Mrs. Music," she sobbed an hour later, when Hagar had fallen into a fitful slumber and Charity herself had gone down-stairs.

"Well, dear, I don't wonder at you," Mrs. Music said, sympathetically. "I haven't often seen anybody in a harder situation than yourn. I've been thinkin' about you all the while I've been at work. 'Tain't him as is took as 'll feel the harm he's done. He's safe. He's gone where he'll see the Lord's

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mercy close to. But you that's left behind to right his wrongs 'll have the cross laid heavy on your shoulder."

"It is heavy, Mrs. Music. It's always been heavy."

"And it 'll be heavier still. There's very hard things before you for to do."

Charity wiped her eyes and looked up with an air of silent interrogation. They were sitting beside the bed on which William Pennland lay as if asleep. Mrs. Music had swept and washed and smoothed, so that, as far as possible, everything disordered or unsightly in the room had disappeared. Charity noticed that William's face had grown younger in death, and that as he lay on the clean, white pillow it was more like that of the hero of her dreams. For the first time something of the old love awoke in her.

"What do you mean, Mrs. Music? What's left for me to do? My life 'll be buried when he's laid in his grave."

"Oh no, it won't, dear. We feels like that in the first days o' trouble; but we soon finds out as there's reasons for us to live on."

"But I've none."

"Your reason is—up-stairs."

"Her!" Charity cried, hoarsely. "Oh, I couldn't. You don't know what it 'ud mean to me. Her and me 'ud never be to each other anything but a living sorrow. There's nothing between us but—"

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“But him, dear,” Mrs. Music said, quickly, pointing towards the bed.

Charity looked puzzled.

“He was my husband—” she began.

“And you loved him,” Mrs. Music interrupted, again.

“I did, Mrs. Music. I loved him true. No woman ever loved a man more. This afternoon when I came and saw him I couldn’t take it in as it was him. It didn’t seem him. But now that he’s gone, and you’ve made him look as I remember him, it’s all coming over me like a great wave; and oh! I don’t know whatever I shall do.”

She broke down with another sob, and Mrs. Music waited until she had grown calm again.

“He was your husband,” the elder woman resumed, “and let him ha’ been good or bad, false or true, no one was so near to him as you. No one couldn’t be so near to him, not if he’d married ’em ten times over.”

“It’s a comfort to me to hear you say that. I wish you’d tell it to—her.”

“If it ’ud do any good I would; but there’s a lot to think on, dear. Your husband has left you a heap o’ wrongs—”

“My wrongs,” Charity exclaimed, with tearful passion.

“Yes, and other people’s. I won’t say whose, be-

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cause you'll see 'em for yourself. And it's for you as his wife to put 'em right as far as such things ever *can* be put right."

"Me?" Charity cried, in sheer astonishment, ceasing to sob. "Me, Mrs. Music? Me that's suffered so—"

"That's the very reason, dear. If you hadn't been able to suffer you wouldn't be able to comfort. If the Lord hadn't made you a good woman, He wouldn't ha' given you the work o' one to do."

"You mean," Charity began slowly, "as I—?"

But Mrs. Music would not let her finish.

"I don't mean nothing, dear, but what your own 'eart 'll tell you to do. Anybody can see that poor crittur of a girl's condition. And who in all this world can she look to but the wife of the man—"

"Where are you, woman?" came a tremulous, querulous cry from overhead. "Why do you leave me? Come back. I don't want you to go away."

Charity rose quickly.

"You see how it is already," Mrs. Music reasoned. "It's what your husband's left to you, and, bitter or sweet, you can't say it No."

Charity sobbed again, but controlled herself before she had reached the top of the steep, narrow stair.

"I'm coming," she called. "Don't fret, then. I'd just gone down for a minute. There, there! Lie still, poor thing. You was frightened, wasn't you?"

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"I was dreaming," Hagar cried. "I was dreaming as the baby—"

"There, there!" Charity broke in, as she tried to smooth the hard pillow. "Don't talk now. We'll have lots o' time later. There, there! Try to sleep again."

"It 'll be a lawful baby," Hagar muttered, as she turned her face to the wall and shut her eyes. "Nobody needn't say different."

"Must I stand by and see all this?" Charity asked herself. "Must I take his sin upon myself and bear it? Is there any power on earth or in heaven as 'll give me the strength to do it?"

Then, as Hagar fell once more into a sobbing slumber, Charity sank slowly to her knees.

XII

“THERE’LL have to be a funeral,” Mrs. Music said, decisively.

“It could be a quiet one,” Charity observed.

“Funerals is ginerally quiet, dear; but you can hardly have ’em wi’out some kind o’ stir.”

“Solemn stir,” Jonas added. “That’s the best o’ funerals. They’ll work you up and calm you down all at once. Some o’ the most cheerin’ times I’ve ever had has been at funerals. You’re sorry, like, to see a fellow-crittur go; and yet it’s comfortin’ to think that, if anybody was to be took, it ain’t you.”

It was late at night, and the three had just finished the supper Mrs. Music’s skill had been able to create almost out of nothing. The doctor had come, and, finding nothing else to do, had given Hagar a sleeping-draught. Then Thankful had taken him away; and Charity was glad to see him go. He had called Hagar “the poor, young widow,” and had bidden them all be considerate of her. Charity had found it hard to be overlooked, even by this stranger, who knew nothing of her life. It seemed to take from her the very rights of grief and widowhood.

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"You're a new-comer in these parts, I think," the doctor had said to her, courteously enough.

"Yes, a relation o' Soldier Penn," Mrs. Music had replied, hastily, with a look so significant that Charity had to choke her resentment down. "I said that, dear," Mrs. Music explained after the doctor had gone, "because I knowed you'd like time to think before you decided whether or not it was worth while to tell everything right out before the whole P'int, like. Dr. Grigg is a terrible talker, even if he haven't got a roof to his mouth! What he knows the P'int don't have to wait for long."

"Why should they wait?" Charity asked, with a little flush. "Ain't I William Pennland's wife? Why shouldn't they be told it?"

"Well, the doctor is awful thick wi' the Whites; that's this pore young thing's relations. And he could see for hisself what her state is."

For the moment Charity said no more. She went up-stairs and sat by Hagar's bed and pondered. She did not descend again till Mrs. Music called her to supper.

"I'll come down, but I can't eat," she answered.

"Well, try, dear," Mrs. Music urged. "You've a lot to go through, and you mustn't let yourself break down."

She waited till the end of supper before speaking of the funeral, though, as a practical woman, her

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mind had been busy with the subject from the first.

“You can’t be more for quiet funerals than I be, Mrs. Pennland,” she pursued, when Jonas had expressed himself; “but still, when the remains has folks, there’s things you’ve got to do. There’s no ‘by your leave’ in death, dear. As it comes, you’ve got to take it, onconvenient as it may be. And an onconvenienter way to die I can’t think of than just right here.”

“That wasn’t his fault,” Charity asserted, in defence of the departed.

“No, ma’am,” Jonas interposed. “Betsy only means as it leaves all the more for you and her and me to plan for and to do. We’ve ordered the coffin. There’s that done. It ’ll be Billy Preeper’s make, and him and Thankful ’ll have it here sometime tomorrow morning.”

“I’ll pay for everything,” Charity said, eager to assume all wifely responsibilities. “Nothing need be done poor.”

“I thought so,” Jonas responded, “and so I ordered it handsome—silver-mounted, wi’ a plate wi’ his name and age on it. I put him down at forty-five, thinkin’ it a good middlin’ number. It’s about how old the husband of a woman o’ your age ought to be, ma’am, as I figured it up. I’m forty-five myself; though anybody ’ud give me younger.”

“Thank you, Jonas,” Charity murmured. “I’m

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that upset in mind that I hadn't thought o' them things for myself. They've got to be done, of course. It's what I did when father went. His was silver-mounted, too; and 'Aged 69' was underneath his name. I'm glad you thought o' that. I want everything o' the best."

"And that p'int being settled," Mrs. Music said, in her practical way, "the next is, where's he to be buried? Me and Jonas has been talkin' that over, and if you'd be willin', Mrs. Pennland—"

"Why couldn't it be right here—somewhere in the woods or by the shore?" Charity suggested.

"Oh, Mrs. Pennland! How could you think o' such a thing?" Mrs. Music pushed her chair back from the table, so as to find space to lift up her hands in a gesture of painful astonishment. "Here, did you say? Here, in this dreadful wild spot, where you couldn't have a tombstone, nor cover his grave wi' golden moss, nor anything? It 'ud be talked of on the P'int for years to come, as how we'd buried a fellow-crittur and a human bein' out o' consecrated ground, as though he was no better than a animal. You couldn't do it, dear. It 'ud be thought of dreadful. You'd be sorry for it yourself some day; and, like as not, you'd want to be at the trouble and expense of movin' him. Oh, no; it 'ud never do; it 'ud never do."

"No, ma'am; it 'ud never do; it 'ud never do," Jonas echoed. "The only man as I ever hearn tell o'

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bein' buried out o' consecrated ground was this here Billy Preeper's grandfather's uncle, as was hanged for sheep-stealin' in the old days. *He* was buried at cross-roads, up Musquodoboit way; and you wouldn't have it said as you're husband was the like o' that."

The brother and sister were so moved that Charity took their sentiments as indicative of public opinion in general, and did not insist further.

"What I was going to say is this, dear," Mrs. Music resumed. "There's our lot in the church-yard over at the P'int. It's big enough for two such families as ours, and is always kept mowed and in good order. There's golden-moss on every grave, and a border o' ribbon-grass and life-everlasting runnin' all around it. A genteeler place for bein' buried in you'll not find this side o' Halifax, though I say it as shouldn't. And if you'd like a corner of it—"

"No, no," Charity exclaimed, hurriedly. "It 'ud be like giving him away again. Ain't there anywhere that I can have him all to myself?"

"You could buy a plot in the church-yard," Jonas suggested.

"Where I could be brought and laid by him, when all this trouble and tangle is over. That's what I want—just the right to lie down by him at last, when it is too late for any one to say me nay."

"And you shall have it, dear," Mrs. Music answered, with motherly promptness. "I know just how

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you feel about it. You don't want him in no one's ground but your own, be they who they be; and I know the very spot for you, too—right on the top o' the hill, wi' a lovely view in summer-time for the mourners."

After more discussion and description, Charity agreed; and so another point was settled.

"And then there'd be the clergyman," Mrs. Music said, after a short pause. "Our clergyman 'ud do it and willing. He's a beautiful clergyman for buryin'. I've heard him read the service so as people cried as had hardly known the corpse by sight. I suppose Soldier Penn never turned?"

"No," Charity replied. "I've asked H—Hagar"—she brought out the name hardly—"I've asked Hagar about it, and she says he didn't. They was married by the Catholic priest at Golden Cove Mines, but William said as how his folks was always Church of England, and he'd never go over to Papery, whatever else he did."

"Nor me neither," said Jonas. "I've hearn tell as how our family was druv out o' France because they wouldn't give up the Church of England when the Pope passed a law agin it."

"So there'd be no hitch about that," Mrs. Music remarked, keeping close to the point under discussion. "Thankful could take word to our clergyman when he went back to the P'int, after him and Billy

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Preeper has brought the coffin. He could carry the invitations to the funeral at the same time."

"The what, Mrs. Music?" Charity cried, starting with an air of distress.

"I said invitations, dear," Mrs. Music answered. She had come to the point she had meant to make, and knew she must stand firm. "There's folks as have got to be asked for this pore Hagar's sake. She've got no one to turn to but her mother's kin, and I know the Whites 'ud feel dreadful if they wasn't invited to the funeral."

"Well, ask them," Charity said, with an air of resignation. "It don't matter."

"And yet," Mrs. Music reflected, "I don't know but what they'll feel worse if they come and hear what they've got to hear. They was just gettin' over the disgrace o' havin' their sister run away wi' Michael Levanti; and when they heard o' this young Hagar's marriage to Soldier Penn they'd begun to soften towards her. I believe, if all had gone right, as they'd ha' come and been friends wi' her. Even now, if they knowed she was a widder, and in her state, they'd see her through her trouble. There's Jabez White's wife—Keziah Preeper, as was—she's a good-'earted woman, and I've often hearn her say that she didn't believe as how the family had acted right by their sister Hagar when they turned their back on her and wouldn't see her no more. She'd be

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good to *this* Hagar, I'm pretty sure. But she's a awful partic'lar woman; and when she knows as she's not a widder, and can't be a widder; and as how the baby that's expected 'ull be— Well," Mrs. Music sighed, heavily, "I suppose we must ask 'em, anyhow. Kin is kin, and families has to share each other's sin and shame, as they shares each other's love and money. But it's hard on the Whites, as have tried their best to live respectable and hold their head up on the P'int; and it's hard on this pore, forlorn bit of a young girl as didn't know she was doin' any harm."

Mrs. Music sighed again, and Jonas coughed huskily. Silence fell between the three till Charity said, "I'll just go and see if the candles is burning rightly."

She passed into the next room, but did not come out again at once. When she had snuffed the candles that stood on the white-draped table beside the bed, she sat down and looked long at the face of the man who had been the ruling element in her life.

"Can it be that I'm to put right what he's left wrong?" she asked herself, as she leaned towards him with hands clasped tightly in her lap; "and am I to let another woman call herself his widder? Is that to be my duty? Is that why I've been made his wife? Am I to take the woman he betrayed and the child—? Oh!" she gasped, "Oh!" But she would not let them

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hear her. She buried her face in the coverlet of the bed and stifled her cries.

“ Oh, William, William, you’ve given your Charity a hard thing to do.”

Then across her mind there stole the words, spoken, as it were, outside her, as she had heard such words spoken at other times before: “ Charity suffereth long and is kind. Charity never faileth—never, never faileth.”

When she had grown calm again she raised herself and kissed the cold, white hand that lay outside the coverlet. It was the first sign of pardoning love she had shown him. Then she passed out into the other room.

“ I won’t go to the funeral, Mrs. Music,” she said, in a broken voice, sitting down where she had sat before. “ She can go. Nobody needn’t know I’m here, nor who I am, nor nothing at all. The Whites needn’t be disgraced—nor her—nor him—nor nobody. It don’t matter about me.”

“ God bless you, dear,” Mrs. Music cried, springing up and taking Charity’s face between both her hands. “ The Lord ’ll reward you for bein’ kind to her.”

“ I ain’t kind to her,” Charity protested, struggling to her feet again. “ I’m doin’ it only because I ought. I’ve got hard feelings towards her. I’ve got ’em even towards the unborn babe. I don’t want it to be born. I don’t want another woman to bear his

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child. I ain't doing it willing. But she can go, and she can call herself his wife, and she can have my black jacket and my black bonnet, and all my other black things. They won't fit her, but—"

"I'll make 'em fit her, dear; and she can have my new crape veil, and—"

"Oh, Mrs. Music!"

Jonas rose hastily, and went out, slamming the door behind him as if in some unusual emotion. For a while there was no sound in the house at all, except that of Charity crying softly on Mrs. Music's breast.

XIII

HAGAR went to the funeral, wearing Charity's black gown and Mrs. Music's veil. When the mourners and the clergyman arrived, Charity effaced herself, sitting out of sight, on the top of the steep stairway. She took what comfort she could as she listened to the service, and wondered whether the husband who had forsaken her in life, and been denied her in death, would be restored to her in the resurrection. She had wept so much that she could weep no more, and so St. Paul's sonorous sentences fell on her ear with a sense of vague, spiritual consolation. She was able to sit still when, after the prayers, she heard a shuffle of feet in the room below, and knew the coffin-lid was being screwed down. Two or three wild screams from Hagar rang through the house, and then she, too, controlled herself. The shuffle of feet became general, and Charity knew they were carrying William Pennland out.

"It's all over," she whispered to herself. "Him and me 'll never meet again. 'The Lord gave and the Lord hath taken away,'" she quoted from the service she had just heard; "'blessed be the name of the

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Lord!" But she knew her resignation was not sincere.

Suddenly the house became silent. Every one had gone out. By-and-by the dull sound of feet on the grass-plot before the door died away, too. Only then did Charity venture to creep down-stairs and peep from the window. The little procession was already tramping along the Old Shore road towards the cove. The clergyman walked first, alone. Then appeared the black coffin, swaying slowly on the shoulders of six stalwart, swarthy Levantis, Hagar's relatives from Golden Cove Mines. The noon-day sun glinted on the imitation-silver handles. After the coffin came she who was already called "the Widow Penn," trailing Charity's black gown in the dust, and smothering beneath Mrs. Music's crape. Hagar walked heavily, with bowed head, and leaned on Mrs. Music's arm.

"She's with him to the last," Charity moaned, bitterly, "while I don't dare to show myself or own him."

Mr. and Mrs. Jabez White, whose going to the funeral had caused a flutter of gossip to ripple all over Portuguese Point, followed Hagar and Mrs. Music. Thankful Music and Jonas Boutilier brought up the rear.

"And to think that he should go like this!" Charity lamented—"no better than a fisherman."

After her long romance the conclusion seemed un-

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fittingly lame and tame. Something like the swan and the silver skiff that came for Lohengrin would alone have been worthy of the knight she had adored.

When the procession disappeared, Charity dragged herself out and sat down on a low boulder on the beach. It was where William Pennland himself was used to sit, but she did not know it. For the first time since her arrival she was oppressed by the solitude of her surroundings. The sea, that in the best of weather broke harshly on the pebbly shore, seemed to grate on all her senses. The murmur of the wind in the woods behind swept over her like an unearthly wail. Cape Freels, with the misty wraith of Brother Louis forever climbing up the cliff, overwhelmed her with its immensity. Hungry Island alone offered her some relief. It was there that Jacob Eisenhauer's schooner passed, and opened the world of human sympathies to the dweller on the Old Shore road.

"I'll go back with him," Charity said to herself. "I can't make the journey with Jonas. I was able to do it when I still had a little hope; I can't now that I have none."

Then, all at once, came a longing for the shelter of her own home, and the smell of her flowers, and the sight of the long line of headlands fronting the sea. The dear, inanimate things to which she was used were all that remained to give her any sense of fellowship.

It was nearly nightfall when Hagar, shorn of the

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veil that had been returned to its owner, trudged home alone.

“Thankful Music rowed me across cove,” she explained to Charity as she passed her in the doorway. She went up-stairs and changed her borrowed plumes of mourning for her ordinary dress of coarse, dull green.

“Your things is on your bed,” she said, when she came down again.

“Thank you,” returned Charity.

“I suppose it’s me that ought to thank you,” she replied; “but I don’t. I don’t thank nobody for nothing.”

“You needn’t,” Charity answered, quietly. “I haven’t done nothing for thanks. If I’ve done anything at all, it’s because it was my duty as wife to him that’s gone. Won’t you come and have a bit o’ supper?”

“I don’t want no supper. You can call yourself what you like. It’s all one what they calls you and what they calls me; but they sha’n’t call my baby out of its lawful name.”

“Do come and eat something,” Charity said, coaxingly, drawing her towards the table. “Here’s this bit o’ mackerel as I’ve cooked nice and tasty. You’ll like it, and it ’ll do you good.”

Once seated, the girl ate like a famished creature. From time to time Charity stole a glance at her face,

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but it wore its Indian mask of expressionless impassivity. It was impossible to guess at her emotions.

“And yet she’s mortal pretty,” Charity commented, silently. “It’s hard on men as such faces as that should be set to ensnare ’em. William’s been to blame, no doubt; but any one looking at her ’ud almost pardon him. That is, any one but me,” she corrected. “I can’t help feeling bitter against ’em both.”

When it grew darker Charity lit a candle and placed it between them. As she did so she announced her intention of going home.

“I’d rather Jacob Eisenhauer ’ud take me,” she said. “He’d call for me at Hungry Island, so Jonas Boutilier tells me. I suppose there’s ways o’ getting word to him—that is, if you’d row me out there in your boat.”

For a minute the mask of stolidity dropped from Hagar’s face. The candlelight fell on her, and she looked up with an expression of terror.

“If you say that again you’ll kill me,” she said, with quiet intensity. “You can go if you want to, but not that way.”

Her Indian-like gravity returned at once, but Charity was frightened and said no more.

In the middle of the night, Charity, sleeping fitfully on the couch she had made on the attic floor beside Hagar’s truckle-bed, was roused by a scream.

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"Are you awake, woman?" Hagar called.

"Yes," Charity returned, starting up. "What is it?"

"I was dreaming again," Hagar panted. "I was dreaming as William was here and was going to leave me, to go back to you. He thought you was his wife, and not me; and so I let him go. But it was only a dream. He knowed you wasn't his wife. He didn't love no one but me. And now he's gone — gone — gone where I sha'n't ever see him no more."

The words ended in a loud, tearless wail, like that of a mourning, savage woman. Charity rose and, sitting down on the side of Hagar's bed, attempted to soothe her.

"Try to be patient, poor thing," she murmured, taking Hagar's hand. "It's hard, but God 'll help you to bear it, if you think o' Him."

"It's no use saying them words to me," the girl cried out, in loud impatience. "It's no use saying them words to me when you think I ain't his wife. And you do think it; you do think it. God can't help me to bear bein' p'inted at as the mother of a child wi'out a name."

"But I'd never do that," Charity declared, indignantly. "You know I wouldn't."

"Oh yes, you would. You want every one on the P'int to know as he married you before he married me.

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You're a woman as don't think o' no one but yourself and your own pride."

"Ought you to say that to me when I hid away from the funeral to-day, and gave you my things, and let you take my place, and call yourself by my name as if you had a right to it? Ought you to say that?"

"It was easy for you to do it. You didn't love him like me."

"But I did, Hagar. I did love him. I've loved him all the best part o' my life, and I've lived just in the hope o' his return."

The girl laughed harshly.

"Then what a fool you was, when he wasn't thinkin' about you! He'd loved lots o' women in the years when you was waitin' for him. They was women o' all countries and all races — women he'd forgotten, women whose names he never knew. That's what he told me. When I asked him if he still loved you, he answered, No. Ah, but you was a fool, woman! We're all fools — we as put any trust in men. I loved him, too; but he betrayed me."

"Did you love him true?" Charity asked, almost in surprise. She was slow in taking in the idea that there could ever have been a passion like her own. "Did you love him so as you suffered from it?—so as he was in every thought when you was awake and

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in every dream when you was asleep? That's how I loved him."

"And I loved him so as every thought was him, and every dream was him, and all my life was him. He was more to me than the sky above me and the ground beneath my feet—than the air I breathed and the water I drank." She raised herself in the bed and grasped Charity fiercely by the wrist. "When his words stabbed me through and through, I loved him more. When he was harder to me than man to brute, I loved him more. When I came cringing to his feet, and he beat me back, I loved him more. Woman, you don't know how I loved him. I could tell you, but you couldn't understand. It ain't in you to understand. You're too good, you're too rich, you're too looked up to in the world, to know how a woman like me—a pore, half-outcast girl—can love a man like Soldier Penn when once she's set about it. I loved him so as when I knowed that he didn't love me any longer, that I'd only been a pastime to him, that he'd go on and love other women after me, it made me love him more. He'd ha' quitted me and gone his way, but I couldn't let him. When he put hisself in my power I loved him so as I had to keep him there. I couldn't let him go, woman—I couldn't, I couldn't. He had to die; there was no help for it. And now I'm glad he's dead. He'll never put another woman in the place o' me—not now he won't. I love

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him so as I'd rather have him in his grave than belong to any one else as he'd belonged to me. I ain't sorry for nothing. If 'twas to do again, I'd do it again. And yet I love him more and more and more."

Her voice rose, and she ended with a shriek. Charity, to calm her, leaned forward and took her in her arms. The girl clung to the elder woman, and poured out her grief in wild, savage cries. Charity sobbed, too. But it was all over in a minute. Hagar suddenly fell back upon the pillow and began to speak in quite another tone.

"Was he pretty when you first knowed him?" she asked, as though they had been talking quietly.

"He was very handsome," Charity managed to stammer through her tears.

"Did he always wear his sojer's clothes in them days?"

"Whenever I saw him he did."

And then came, now from the one, now from the other, a long series of questions and answers lasting through the night. Charity recounted to Hagar the history of her first meeting with William Pennland, and the chain of little happenings that had led up to love. On each side there was a mingling of curiosity, jealousy, sympathy, anguish, and anger, as confidences came from the other. Charity felt her heart almost bursting as she, on her part, wrung

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from Hagar the details of her life and love with William; but she would spare herself no pang. When he was the topic, there was nothing she could forbear to know. The girl told how she had felt when she first saw him, and how he, after a day or two on the Old Shore road, would not suffer her to be out of his sight. She repeated the honeyed words Charity herself had heard, and she uttered them with an accent that Charity knew to be his very own. Whole phrases that Charity had long considered sacred to herself were now poured forth by Hagar as evidence of his love for her. Vows that Charity had believed no man could take twice now fell from Hagar's lips in the tone in which William had made them eleven years before. It was as if the very innermost sanctuary of Charity's soul were being rifled, and yet she would know all. Hagar was talking peacefully now; and, with jealous, foolish eagerness to hear the worst, Charity plied her with questions. The answers were truthful, direct, brutal. The recklessness with which Charity sought to suffer was equalled by the readiness with which Hagar inflicted pain. It was not in the girl's untrained nature either to conceal a fact or to soften a blow. Sitting in the dark, on the side of the truckle-bed, Charity wrung out the dregs of humiliation, while Hagar's talk ran on.

“I was goin' to marry Alick Eisenhauer then,” she

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said, as though the mere telling of her story gave her some relief. "He was a nice boy, and I was kind o' fond on him. He used to come down from Guysborough to see father about lumber. That was when he sailed on the *Mary Maria*, and before he was on the *Two Twin Sisters*, where he met William. He had fair hair and blue eyes, but he wasn't a pretty man like William. When I saw William I knowed I'd never marry Alick Eisenhauer."

"Did you tell him so?" Charity asked.

"Tell Alick? No. What was the use? He was sailin' away for the West Indies or some other kind o' foreign part, so I just let him go. How did I know but what he might be drowned before he got back? There's always things happening to sailor-men. Besides, William told me it wasn't worth the fuss. I let him go wi'out saying nothing; and after he went, and father was shot, William and me was married. Alick Eisenhauer never came back no more. When he heard as it was all over between him and me, he changed ships, and ain't been this way since. He was a nice boy; and I'd ha' married him if William hadn't begged me not to. He was so fond o' me, William was. He said that our two lives was like two rivers as had come down from two mountains, far apart, but once having met they must always flow together, just like one."

"But he said that to me!" Charity cried,

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painfully. "He said it over and over again. It's one of his sayings as I've treasured in my heart—"

"You was foolish to do it," Hagar broke in, roughly. "If he said it to you he didn't mean it. You can see that by the way he left you. He's said it to lots of other women, too, most likely. But he said it to me last. It's a vow as he'll never take to no one else. His life ended in mine. That makes me his wife. Whatever any one says, they'll lie if they speaks different to that!"

When the chill dawn broke Charity crept back to her bed again. Hagar clung to her, but Charity tore herself away.

"Don't leave me," the girl pleaded, with querulous crying. "I want to feel you by me. I don't want to be left alone. But you're a selfish woman," she burst out, as she heard Charity lie down. "You don't think o' no one but yourself—and me in so much trouble. Oh, William, William! Oh, my beloved William, why did you go away from me? Why couldn't it ha' lasted? You never loved no one as you loved me. You said so. You said so. And now you're in your grave; and I'm left here wi' a hard-hearted woman as don't think o' no one but herself."

"I'll go as soon as ever I can get away," thought Charity. "I'll come to hate her if I stay, and I

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never expected to hate any one. I'll go with Jonas, if I can't go no other way. But I'll go."

And yet as she listened to Hagar piteously begging her to return to the bedside Charity felt something tugging at her heartstrings that was not wholly pain.

XIV

It was afternoon next day when a loud knock rang through the silent house on the Old Shore road. The two startled women looked at each other in sudden fright, but Charity went to the door and opened it. On the threshold stood a large, florid man, and a little, thin-lipped woman.

"We've come to see the Widow Penn," said the man.

"Our niece," the woman added.

Then Charity recognized Mr. and Mrs. Jabez White, whom she had seen in the distance, at the funeral, on the previous day. She invited them in, and they entered. Hagar sat still, in her place in the corner, gazing at the visitors with big, frightened eyes. There was a minute's hesitation till Charity, assuming the office of hostess, begged the guests to be seated.

"Well, niece," Mrs. White managed to say, when they had sat down. "We've come to see you."

Hagar stared and said nothing, so that Charity felt obliged to remark that they were very kind. She hoped, too, that they were not overtired.

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"When folks sets out on a errand like ours," said Mrs. White, in a tone of prim authority, "they expects to be tried. That's nothing. They're not thinking o' theirselves, otherwise they'd be at home. But it's very rare that you can do good and save yourself trouble at the same time, as I said to Mr. White before we started. But he's one as is always for turning hard into easy, and for trying to make butter wi'out working the churn."

"Well, I'm sure I've come, Keziah," Mr. White protested, in self-defence, "and I've come willing."

"And if *you* ain't willing to go to the help of your own sister's child," Mrs. White remarked, fanning herself with her pocket-handkerchief, "who in the world should be? Hagar White wasn't *my* sister; but if she had been she'd ha' been stood by, disgrace or no disgrace."

"If we've done wrong," Mr. White ventured, on behalf of himself and his family, "we're sorry for it, and we're ready to make amends. When Hagar left us—that's your mother, niece—we felt that bad we didn't know which way to take it. But that's twenty year and more ago; and what we've come for to say now—"

"Excuse me, Mr. White," Mrs. White broke in, sharply, "but I think I should be allowed to speak. There's people as are readier to take credit than they be to take pains. That ain't my way, and never was,

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or my name wouldn't ha' been Keziah Preeper. After I've done the plannin' and persuadin' and the gettin' all the family to consent, it seems to me I should be permitted to do the showin' forth. I didn't expect to have the words taken out o' my mouth, as though I wasn't able to utter 'em. But that's the way wi' men, ma'am," she added, turning politely towards Charity. "They'll let the women plant, and they'll let the women reap, but they must step in themselves and take the grain."

Charity tried to smile sympathetically, but she saw at once that she had awakened Mrs. White's curiosity.

"You ain't a this-shore woman?" Mrs. White asked, after a quick but accurate inspection of Charity's face, figure, and attire. "I don't seem to've seen you anywhere before."

"I'm a relation of Soldier Penn," Charity faltered.

"And your name might be—?"

"Mrs. Pennland."

"Penn—Pennland," Mrs. White commented, musingly. "It's strange how much the two names is alike. What relation to him might you be, ma'am?"

"A relation by marriage," Charity forced herself to reply, though she longed to cry out, "His wife!"

"Near or distant?"

"Middling near, ma'am," she answered, her conscience reproaching her for the subterfuge.

"And would you live anywhere down Guysborough

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way?" Mrs. White spoke in the potential, feeling that mood to be less directly inquisitive.

"Down Shelburne way, ma'am," Charity replied, courteously. "My home is at a place called Fisher's Grant."

"I've hearn tell of it," Mrs. White said, condescendingly. "Betsy Music—her that was Betsy Boutilier—comes from there. Would you be a widow, ma'am?"

"Yes."

"How many children might you have?"

"None, ma'am."

"Your husband wouldn't be dead long, I suppose?"

"No—not very long."

"No, he wouldn't be," Mrs. White agreed, looking at Charity with a critical air. "You're too young to've been a widow long. He'll have been lost at sea, perhaps? It's the usual way o' dying down in them fishin' places."

"He went to sea," Charity said, trying to bear up under this torture. "But he never came back to me."

"Then I hope you didn't put on weeds till you was sure he was dead. No?" she went on, as Charity shook her head. "Well, that's good. Young women is so heartless nowadays. I've known o' sailors as have had hardly time to get to their v'age's end before their wives had swaddled theirselves in crape."

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"That was the way wi' Billy Greenfield's wife," Mr. White began, in an anecdotic vein; but Mrs. White would not permit him to go further.

"We didn't travel all this ways to talk o' Billy Greenfield's wife," she interrupted, sharply.

"Well, you started me on it, Keziah."

"It ain't needful to sing a hymn every time I hums the tune. We've come here to talk to niece; but I can't say a word wi'out your beginnin' on Billy Greenfield."

"Well, niece ain't hinderin' you, anyway, Keziah. She 'ain't said a word since we've arrove."

"I'm afraid she's a little upset by your coming and her trouble and one thing or another," Charity explained, apologetically. "You mustn't think she ain't thankful."

"Thanks is something I don't look for, ma'am," said Mrs. White. "Other people may do their good deeds for a reward, or expecting to be looked up to, but that ain't me. I does my duty and I does it well, thanks or no thanks. If I'd had to live on other people's praise for what I've done I'd ha' had poor diet. Not but what there's them as I've planned for and contrived for ever since the day I married; and if it was in the hope o' bein' thought higher of I might ha' saved my pains."

"If you mean me, Keziah—"

"I mean them as 'll know what I've been when I'm

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took off sudden and my place is empty." Mrs. White pursed up her thin lips and turned towards Hagar. "Now, niece," she began, in the tone of a call to attention—"now, niece, if you'll leave off staring, and don't look like a woods' thing, as is scared by the step of a passer-by, I'll tell you what we've come for."

Hagar shrank farther into her corner, and looked appealingly towards Charity. There was a minute's hush of expectation before Mrs. White began to speak again.

"Ever since I married your uncle Jabez—for he is your uncle, let him be ashamed of it as he may—I've talked to him and his family as to how they wasn't doin' right by you, nor by your mother before you. Let it be, I said, that she lowered herself when she married your father; let it be as it was a come-down for a girl with respectable folks on the P'int to run away wi' a Catholic farm-hand, as had Greek blood and Injun blood and every other kind o' blood in his body; let it be as she disgraced herself and them; I don't say contrary to all that; but what I do say is as folks is folks, and relations is relations, and you can't turn your back on your own kin no more than you can turn your back on your own nose. When your poor mother died, eight years ago, there wasn't a White as I didn't go down on my knees to, to beg 'em to go and bury her. But no! They was too

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proud. Says I, 'The Lord 'll punish you and bring you down.' Says they, 'It's her as has brought us down, and we can't go lower. She's made us talked on by the whole P'int.' Says I—"

"I've said we're sorry, Keziah," Mr. White exclaimed, in protest. "It's no use bringing all this up now. We're ready to take the girl and do honest by her."

"*You're* ready!" Mrs. White cried, in fine scorn. "He means, *I'm* ready, niece. I've come here to say that at long last I've got your mother's family to forget what she brought on 'em, and to offer you a home. You're nothing but a poor, lorn, orfin widder, and you're in trouble besides, and my name wouldn't ha' been Keziah Preeper if I'd left you to fight it out alone. I've got children o' my own; I've got plenty on my hands as it is; but I'm ready to take more. I know as they'll cast it up to us on the P'int as how our niece is only a Levanti and has Injun blood, and they'll cast it up to our children after us; but I ain't one to stop at that. You'll have a home wi' me, and you'll have a good home. When your trouble's over, you can think as to whether you'll go or stay. Maybe you'll get married again. Who knows? We've time to think o' that. But between now and then my home is yourn, and you'll be as welcome as my own. No one can't say fairer."

Mrs. White ceased, holding her head high. A red

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spot came out on each thin cheek. There was a long silence. Every one waited for Hagar to reply.

“Well, niece,” Mr. White said, at last, “what do you think? Your a’nt couldn’t speak kinder if she tried, and I’m willing to let bygones be bygones too, and act just as if we’d never had no grudge against no one.”

Another long silence followed, during which Hagar seemed to crouch farther and farther back into her corner. She stared at Mrs. White with big eyes glowing with fear, but said not a word.

“Well, I suppose we’ll call it settled,” Mr. White remarked, with an effort to break the hush by an air of cheerfulness.

Then Hagar rose slowly, and, without taking her eyes from Mrs. White, crept inch by inch towards Charity. She moved like an Indian stealing through the woods. Suddenly she flung herself at Charity’s feet and threw her arms about her.

“Don’t let ’em take me!” she cried. “Don’t let ’em take me! I won’t go. I don’t want no one but you. They ain’t my kin. I’ve got no kin but you. Oh, don’t let ’em take me—don’t let ’em take me!”

The clasp of Hagar’s arms about her thrilled Charity through and through. All that was woman in her awoke with the touch that told her that some one in the world had need of her—even Hagar Levanti. For the moment she could do nothing but

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press the trembling, sobbing creature to her side while she turned confusedly towards Mr. and Mrs. White.

"You'll excuse her, I know," she said. "She's overwrought wi' all she's been through. She don't know yet how kind you've been, but it 'll come to her when she's more herself, and I know she'll thank you."

"We don't look for it," Mrs. White returned, stiffly. "She ain't like one as 'ud ever be thankful for anything. But if she'll come I'll take her."

"Don't let 'em!—don't let 'em!" Hagar moaned.

"Your a'nt don't mean to force you, niece," Mr. White said, not unkindly.

Charity felt that a decisive moment had arrived, and that she must act with promptness.

"If you'll not be offended, ma'am," she said, gently, "I think she'd be better left wi' me. She's got used to me since I came a few days ago, and I kind o' cling to her. I've told you I'm a relation of Soldier Penn, and I've got a good home and every comfort. I'm all alone in the world, too. So, if you'd trust her to me till her trouble is over—"

"I'm sure you're very welcome," Mrs. White replied, with acid politeness. "I've done my part, and no one can't say as I could ha' done more. She wouldn't be doing me a favor by coming—not she. It was only Christian kindness, and no desire o' my own, as tempted me to ask her."

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When they went away Charity accompanied them down the road, trying to soften the effect of Hagar's ungraciousness. On her return Hagar met her in the doorway.

“So you see I *am* his wife,” the girl cried, triumphantly. “You said yourself you was only a relation o’ Soldier Penn. If you’d been his wife you’d ha’ been only too glad to say so. He had no wife but me.”

XV

It was not an easy task to persuade Hagar to go to Fisher's Grant. She was like a bird that is shy of every nest but its own. She had no sense of safety away from the Old Shore road with its protecting woods. She had never been farther from home than to Portuguese Point or to Golden Cove Mines. On the Point the prosperous farmers' wives treated her with mingled pity and disdain, and gave her bread-and-milk in the wood-yard. Sometimes the children threw stones after her as she went away. At Golden Cove the miners and sailors ogled her in the streets, and invited her into taverns. Her own relatives, the Levantis, hated her as being the daughter of that Michael who, having married above him, had cut himself away from his own clan. It was always in trembling that she ventured outside the limits of her low-lying forest; it was always with a sense of relief that she came back again. No one but Soldier Penn and Alick Eisenhauer had ever treated her with respect. It was small wonder that she had loved the one, and would have married the other even without love.

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For her father she had felt fear, but little affection. He was a proud and cruel man, whose power lay in his swarthy, Levanti good looks. He had carried off Hagar White, hoping by this marriage to raise himself from the Helot condition to which the Levantis were born, and move as an equal among the Preepers and the Musics in the life of Portuguese Point. When this social citadel was not to be won, Michael Levanti shut himself away from his fellow-men and treated his wife hardly.

Around her the young Hagar wove her first romantic dream. That she—the mother—had become a flimsy, shiftless creature, spending her time in useless lamentations over her lost grandeur, and helpless regrets for the bad marriage she had made, was something the girl never knew. She understood only that her mother had sprung from one of the high-born houses of Portuguese Point, and that there clung about her the air of poetry which belongs to fallen heroines. Hagar White taught her daughter to read a little, to write a little, and to appreciate some of the beauty of the woods and sea. When she died the lonely little girl turned her face into a corner of her room and sobbed out a grief there was no one to share. After that she grew up solitary and neglected, and yet in unconscious revolt against the conditions that made her something like an outcast. Inheriting her mother's fanciful craving for romance and her

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father's proud desire to be the equal of the best, she had once or twice put forth timid claims for recognition by the world outside. The scorn with which her advances were repelled not only cut her to the heart but crushed her developing instincts. Thenceforward she went to Portuguese Point only when some rare errand obliged her. She ceased even to go to mass at Golden Cove Mines. She hid herself, with her shyness and her shame, in her woodland solitudes. Her only companions were the birds and the wild things and the spectre of Frey Luiz forever dragging his misty mantle about the summit of the cape. Now and then she would go down to the shores of Portuguese Cove and gaze wistfully over at the green fields and happy homes whence her mother had been driven out—just as some child of the sons of God and the daughters of men might have stood looking at the ancestral stars.

Into this life of dreams Alick Eisenhower had come like a chapter of healthy prose, Soldier Penn like an epic of noble poetry. Now that these pages were turned down the girl's mind reverted to its former attitude of suspicion and defiance. To the timidity of the forest creature she had added an experience that had taught her to be distrustful. Even under William's love—the one beautiful thing she had known—there had lurked the tragedy of passion burned out and deliberate abandonment.

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"I won't go wi' you," she said to Charity, after the Whites had departed. "I ain't to be tricked. I ain't to be caught. It's a trap as you're layin' for me, but I'll not walk into it—not me."

Days passed in argument, and Charity made no progress. Hagar's answer was always the same. She would not leave her own ground, nor the conditions of which she was sure. When Jonas Boutilier and his sister Betsy came, a week after the funeral; to see, as Mrs. Music put it, "what new turn had been took," Charity was forced to beg their aid.

"I know what you've been through, dear," Mrs. Music responded, with ready sympathy. "It's like implorin' a wild goose to come and hatch in the front settin'-room."

"And I was dreadful mortified by the way she treated Mr. and Mrs. White," Charity complained, with tears in her eyes.

"As for that," Jonas observed, "Jabez White thought she had a good deal o' sperrit, not to be put upon by her a'nt. He praised her awful, and said he hadn't seen a takesomer wench for looks since he couldn't tell the day when."

"Keziah White has got a set-back as she'll never get over," said Mrs. Music. "After telling her husband's relations for fifteen year and more as how they weren't doin' their duty by their sister and their niece she's bein' laughed at by 'em all for the way

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Hagar put her down. I feel for her, I do; for she didn't mean nothing but the girl's good. She's a terrible hand to do for people—"

"If they just stands still and don't call their souls their own, but just lets theirselves be done for," Jonas interpolated.

"And she wasn't sent here by nothing," Mrs. Music continued, "but the milk o' human kindness—"

"Sour milk," Jonas interrupted again.

"But Hagar 'ud never ha' gone with them, I'm sure," Charity argued. "They didn't take her in the right way."

"It 'll be a good thing for Hagar," Mrs. Music said, with her sensible air, "when she finds as people can't stop to worry about her way, but that she's got to put up with theirs. If it comes to talking about ways, dear, who has a better right to hers than Keziah White, as has thought well and done well ever since she's been able to have a mind of her own? If she puts a little too much vinegar in her sauce, that's a small fault in one who never serves nothing but the best o' victuals."

"But you don't want vinegar in pie," said Jonas. "She'd come here to offer Hagar pie, and so—"

"Oh, as for pie," cried Mrs. Music, "what some 'ull call too tart, others 'ull say is tasty. There's no pleasin' everybody's palate, not if you was to go down on your bare knees to do it."

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“Hagar ain’t fidgety about her food,” said Charity, whose mind being literal could not easily keep up with the swallow-flight of metaphor. “It’s her other ways as makes me so ashamed. When she see you come she darted off into the woods, as though she was afraid you’d shoot her. It makes me feel bad, Mrs. Music, when you’ve been so kind to her.”

“Don’t you mind it, dear,” Mrs. Music answered, soothingly. “She ain’t the first colt as has galloped to t’other side o’ pasture just because a stranger came to the bars. But a little coaxin’ ginerally brings ’em round so as you can get a bridle on ’em. I’ve kep’ my eye on her, and I see her now. She’s over behind that clump o’ birches, lying on the ground and watching on us. I’ll just slip round the house and catch her by coming up behind like. She won’t be afeard o’ me when once I’ve had a word wi’ her.”

As she spoke Mrs. Music rose from her chair on the grass-plot before the cottage, where they had been sitting, and, making a circuit round the back of the house, disappeared from view. Jonas and Charity were thus left alone for the first time in many days. Charity sat silent with downcast eyes, her hands folded in her lap. Jonas coughed huskily, and nervously crossed and uncrossed his legs.

“Well, ma’am,” he said, at last, “we’ve had every kind o’ weather since you and me first talked these things over a few weeks ago. Little did I know what

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was for to come when I brought you word as how William Pennland was a married man. But since you was to be told I'm glad it was me as had the chance to do it."

"You've been more than kind, Jonas. I'm sure I'll never forget it," Charity answered, without looking up.

"I hope you won't, ma'am," he rejoined, earnestly, "because it 'll be a tie. That's what I said from first to last, as soon as I knowed that William Pennland had come back. Says I, I'll go and tell her. It 'll be a tie, says I, and no one knows better nor me what that means."

Charity moved uneasily, but managed to stammer that she was very grateful.

"I thought you would be, ma'am," Jonas agreed. "It was that way wi' my second wife. How I come to get her was all through a tie. Her husband and me—that's to say, her second husband; I was her third—her husband and me was shipmates on *The Orphan*, before I took to the peddlin'. Billy Beech was his name, and a nicer-spoken fisherman never went to the Banks. Well, it happened as he fell sick one day when we was off Newfoundland, and nothing 'ud do but that I must sail him into Heart's Content to see a doctor. He was a good deal of a drinking man, pore chap, and when the sickness fell on him he couldn't stand against it. In the course o' time he

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died; and when we sailed back to Peggy's Cove 'twas me as told the news to his broken-'earted widder. She took it dreadful hard, pore thing, and me being not long a widower I could feel for her. Says she to me from the very first, 'Mr. Boutilier, the way you've taken care o' Billy 'ull be a tie that you and me 'ull find it hard to break.' Later on, when she'd stopped mourning, and had begun to take notice again, she said to every one as 'twasn't no use to talk to her about anybody but Jonas Boutilier, and that there was a tie as she'd never get over as long as she lived. That's the way she felt about the good turn I'd done her."

"I don't wonder at it, Jonas," Charity murmured, still without looking up.

"Nor me, ma'am," Jonas said, simply. "She knowed very well the care I'd took o' my first wife, and how I had money laid by. A woman wi' a good deal less sense than her 'ud have seen as I wasn't a catch as could be hooked every day. And I 'ain't gone down in value since then, thank God. There's fruit as is best picked green, and there's fruit as you'll fancy most when it's ripe and rosy. 'Tain't for me to say which I be. I ain't one to sing his own praises when other folks can do it just as well. But I'll say, ma'am, and I ought to say, as no woman who ever married me had cause to be sorry for the step they'd took."

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"I'm sure they hadn't," Charity assented, for the sake of saying something.

"Well, I'm glad to know your opinion, ma'am; and if that's the way you feel I hope as the tie—"

"Why, here's Mrs. Music coming back with Hagar," Charity exclaimed, rising hastily. "She's got Hagar's hand and is making her talk quite cheerful. She's wonderful kind, Mrs. Music is."

"Oh, it ain't kindness," Jonas said, deprecatingly. "It's just our family way. Betsy's got it like the rest of us. My second wife—Mrs. Beech as was—used to say as we was a family it was a pleasure to marry into. She knowed what marryin' was, too; for what with having had three husbands of her own, and her second husband—that's Billy Beech—having had two wives before her, and me having had one, there wasn't much in a Adam and Eve way as she hadn't thought out. She's said many a time that once you'd got a tie it didn't do much good to fight against it—"

"I think I'll just go to meet Mrs. Music," Charity interrupted, slipping away.

"What I've been saying to Hagar," Mrs. Music remarked, as the three women all returned to the grass-plot and sat down again, "is just this, that she must lay a-bed as late as she likes in the morning, and don't do no heavy work, but let herself be took care on, and if she takes a sudden fancy to anything she must have it."

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Hagar sat with eyes fixed on the ground, the long, curving black lashes making a dark line on the golden tint of the skin.

“And if she could get a change o’ air,” Mrs. Music continued, “it ’ud be so much the better. I know her A’nt Keziah wants her awful; but it ain’t much change just to go over to the P’int.”

“I wouldn’t go,” the girl said, sullenly.

“Well, I think you’re in the right, dear,” Mrs. Music responded, diplomatically. “You needs something further away, and more different. ’Ain’t you got any other relations as you’d like to make a visit to?”

“You know very well I haven’t,” Hagar answered, looking up savagely. “I’ve only got her,” she added, pointing at Charity, “and she’s a hard-hearted woman as don’t think o’ no one but herself.”

“Come, now, missy,” Jonas spoke up, with spirit. “You mustn’t say them things, because they ain’t true.”

“She’s going to leave me here alone,” the girl broke out. “She’s ashamed o’ me. She’s going back to her riches and her fine garden, and I’m to be left here in the woods like a animal. It’s no use all o’ you coming to talk to me, and tell me I must do this and that. You’re against me, every one o’ you. You’ve got some trap to get me into, and to make out as my child won’t be lawful born—”

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"Tut, tut, missy," Jonas interrupted. "It ain't reason for you to go on like that."

"I'm not against you, Hagar," Charity cried, the swift color mounting to her face. "I want to do well by you and be your friend."

"Anybody can see that, dear," Mrs. Music reasoned, addressing herself to Hagar. "You see you're in the habit o' being a good deal alone. You ain't used to folks, nor to folkses' ways. But you've got to be, if you're goin' to get through such a trouble as yourn. You've got to suppose as people 'ull be as good as what they say they'll be. If it wasn't for taking folks at their word there'd be no living at all. They'll deceive you now and then, maybe. That you've got to look for and put up with; but every one won't deceive you in everything; and it ain't in nature for a body like Mrs. Pennland here to wish to do you harm. There's cattle as no one 'ud swear by till they'd tried 'em, but there's others as you can tell at a glance is the best o' stock. I should say as you was a girl wi' too much sense to take one for t'other. And for you to set there and say as Charity Pennland is layin' a trap for you is enough to make a saint lose patience. I ain't a saint, and that's all that keeps me from losin' mine. But it 'll be well for you, dear, to remember as there's a limit to what even your best friends 'ull stand, and not to push 'em too far."

"I ain't pushing no one; it's them as is pushing

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me. Why do you all come here and make out as I must do as you tell me? I haven't asked you. I don't want you. I'm nothing but a outcast. I'm a Levanti. I'm a Greek. I'm a Injun. I ain't a P'int girl as has got a home and people to stand by her. My mother's dead, my father's shot, and Soldier Penn is in his grave. I'm nothing to no one—no more than a bird or a wild-cat. Why can't you let me be?"

"Because folks can't be let be when they're in your state. 'Twouldn't be human. And what I say to you, dear, is this, that when a woman has got a friend like Charity Pennland to stand by her, the Lord has made up to her a good deal of what He's took away."

"I don't want Him to," the girl declared. "I'd rather everything 'ud go."

"Come, come, missy," Jonas cried, warningly. "That's onthankful. You'll deserve to be taken at your word if you talk like that."

"She don't mean it, Jonas," Charity said, almost tenderly. "She don't mean to say anything onkind, Mrs. Music. You must excuse her. She ain't well, and she's been through so much, poor thing. She'll go wi' me, I make no doubt, when she gets to understand things different."

Charity drew her chair near to Hagar's and let her hand rest on the girl's shoulder. The touch—that

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under the circumstances was almost a caress—was not resented. Hagar lifted her dark, burning eyes to Charity's, and for once seemed nearly grateful. A faint glow came into her cheeks, and something like a tremor passed over her slender frame. But she made no further objection to the plan for taking her to Fisher's Grant. She remained distrustful and suspicious, like a timid, wild thing suffering itself to be coaxed from its native woods; but the touch of Charity's hand had subdued something of her half-savage shyness.

"I'll go," she conceded, at last, "but the minute I want to come back I'll have to be let do it."

"That you shall, dear," Mrs. Music assured her, "and either Jonas or me 'ull fetch you."

So the unwilling consent was won suddenly, no one knowing how, save that Charity felt that in some way inexplicable to herself virtue had gone out of her.

XVI

It was not until Charity had returned to Fisher's Grant that she realized the change which had come into her life. It was as if she had been transported to a world where all the points of the compass were different. She had to direct her thoughts into new channels, to form new habits, and to dwell on new expectations. Amid the familiar scenes the unlooked-for turn of events had a keener poignancy. It was hard to take up again the old round of duties without the motive of doing them for William. It was harder still to know that that motive had been a futile one, and that not only would her hero never return, but that he had been a mere phantom of her own creation. The thin, sharp-featured, bearded man she had seen die in the cottage on the Old Shore road gradually supplanted in her memory the rosy-cheeked warrior of her dreams. She felt shame of the simplicity with which she had trusted and of the ease with which she had let herself be duped. Her resentment was retroactive. It protested alike against her present situation and her past fool's paradise. She mourned not only for the loss of her ideal, but also for the fact

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that it had not been an ideal at all. Her years of faithfulness seemed to mock at her. Every garden flower, every household article, was, in her imagination, instinct with scorn of her long delusion.

“It 'ud ha' been better if he'd died wi'out my ever hearing anything about him,” she thought, as she went about the garden clipping and trimming from habit, but without heart. “I'd got used to waiting. I could ha' gone on wi' it. It gave me something to do. Now I've only got—”

She glanced up to where Hagar sat before the cottage door, listless, idle, unresponsive, sunk into a kind of stupor. Her large, black eyes wandered aimlessly over the garden rich in asters and dahlias and all the splendid flowers of late summer, over the shimmering sea, over the rows of headlands, over the burnished uplands, but she took note of nothing. She rarely spoke; she scarcely seemed to think.

“Anybody 'ud say she had something on her mind,” Charity often thought; but she never got near enough to the girl's heart to touch the springs of confidence. “She's as if she was locked or frozen or turned to stone,” Charity said to herself now. “And yet I can't think o' nothing to do for her that I haven't done already. Kindness don't touch her, and love don't melt her. P'r'aps its because she's a Injun and a Greek. Them wild races may not have feelings like us. And yet she loved William. She was able to

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do that. She must have a heart somewhere. I suppose anybody else but me 'ud have the power to find it. But I can't. 'Twouldn't be natural if I could. Her and me can never join in anything like friendship. There's too much between us. We're parted too far. Knowing or unknowing, she's done me the greatest wrong one woman can do another. I'll be good to her; I'll do my duty by her; I'll help her through her trouble; then I'll send her away. I can't do no more."

She filled her basket with blossoms and returned to the cottage.

"Wouldn't you like to take these flowers and sort 'em among the glasses?" she said to Hagar.

"No," the girl answered, laconically.

"It 'ud kind o' help you to pass the time."

"I don't want to."

Charity sighed and did the work herself. It was that moment of leisure at the end of the afternoon when the day's household tasks were done and it was not yet time to prepare the supper.

"Wouldn't you like me to read to you a little bit?" Charity suggested.

"No."

"I'd read another chapter o' the Bible. You liked what I read last."

"I don't want to hear no more of it. I ain't your religion."

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"I think it 'ud comfort you," Charity persisted.
"I often find it comforts me."

"You're easy pleased, maybe. If you had sorrows like mine you'd want more than that to soothe 'em."

"But I *have* sorrows, Hagar. You ought to be able to understand that I've got things to mourn for as much as you."

"Well, mourn for 'em, then. I don't stop you."

"No," Charity said, reproachfully. "You only make my mourning harder. You seem to try to."

"I don't try. I don't care anything at all about it."

Charity sighed again, but said nothing. She only went into the cottage to fetch her Bible. Sitting down by Hagar's side she read silently, while the girl's aimless gaze roved over the landscape.

"It might do you good to take a little walk," Charity proposed when she closed her book.

"I don't want to go."

"Or maybe you'd like it better if I took you out to row a little on the cove. Sam Boutilier 'ud lend us his boat again and welcome."

"I ain't going."

"But it 'ud do you good," Charity urged. "It ain't right for you just to set and do nothing."

"I ain't going," Hagar repeated. "I'd never get into a boat again if I could help it. I've had enough on 'em."

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Charity was at the end of her expedients, and so she rose once more and went into the house. When she returned she brought with her a small work-basket filled with odds and ends of cotton and flannel, which she placed beside her on the bench. Then only did Hagar seem to awake. Her eyes glistened with a new light as Charity threaded her needle. When she drew forth a small white garment Hagar smiled.

"It's for my baby," she said to herself, but so low that Charity did not hear her.

The threading of the needle was difficult, and Charity turned her head to get the light. Then Hagar's hand stole out and touched the little garment.

"It's for my baby," she repeated to herself, and smiled again.

But when Charity turned suddenly, the needle threaded, Hagar's hands were folded in her lap and her face wore its mask of Indian impassivity.

Charity sewed silently, with bent head. When she was at this particular task she felt as if she were stitching with her own nerves. Her repugnance to the work was like physical pain.

"I don't want this child to be born," she would say to herself sometimes, in moments of revulsion from the task imposed upon her. "Why couldn't some other woman as never loved William Pennland have been called upon to do these things? It wouldn't ha' been

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gall and wormwood to her as it is to me. But I've been singled out for everything that's bitter to the taste and humbling to the pride. It's me that ought to ha' borne his child. I'd ha' been so glad of it! It 'ud ha' been such a comfort to me in all my years of loneliness! But no! It's given to her as has no right to it—and I'm to work for it and watch for it and bring it into the world. My husband's child! The child o' the man I loved! And another woman is going to bear it! It's hard—it's hard."

These thoughts were in Charity's mind now, and she set her teeth to repress a cry of impatience or pain. Then she checked herself and remembered that there was something in this world better than even duty.

"I mustn't let myself go on," she thought. "I mustn't dwell on them things. They'll set me crazy and won't do no one any good. After all, it ain't her fault. I must keep that in mind. She didn't know as she wasn't his wife. She doesn't know it even now. She's nothing but a poor, untaught girl who has more need o' kindness than I have. I must remember them words, 'Charity suffereth long and is kind.' That ain't me, but it ought to be. I ain't fit to be named that sort o' Charity. I may suffer long—no one can't deny that—but I'm not kind. Oh, God help me to be!" she prayed, silently. "Help me to bear with the coming o' this baby. Help me to bear with its mother.

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Don't let me hate it. Don't let me hate either on 'em. Don't let me feed my heart on evil things nor fight against Thy will. Bring us through this time o' waiting; and when the baby does come, help me more."

With these protests and prayers surging up in her heart, she stitched and stitched quietly, with bent head. Suddenly Hagar made a quick movement and uttered a raucous, inarticulate moan. Charity looked up, startled.

"I ain't bad!" the girl cried, her arms flung out and her eyes flaming. "I ain't bad! I know you think I am, but—"

"I don't, Hagar; I don't."

"Oh, you do—you do. You must. You can't help it. I *am* onthankful. I can't be any other way. I can't be kind and nice-spoken like you. I ain't like you—no more than a weed can be like a flower. But I ain't bad inside. Don't go for to believe it. I've suffered awful, and I'll never be thankful to no one again. That's what it is. But it ain't badness."

Before there was time to say a word in reply she sprang up, and, seizing Charity's hand, kissed it passionately.

"Don't, Hagar; don't," Charity pleaded.

But the girl was gone. She ran down the garden-path and, slipping through the gate, disappeared among the wild shrubs on the uplands.

XVII

AUTUMN came on and the garden, with one last supreme effort of brilliancy, began to fade. It seemed to Charity as if the very afterglow of her past happiness were fading with it. She collected the seeds and did them up in little packages; but she knew that no flowers could spring from them as lovely as the old. The burnished uplands became brown; the chill, gray sea broke heavily against the reef-like islands and roared up the narrow coves; but the rows of headlands faced the ocean in grim, unchanging strength—unresponsive to the seasons and indifferent to the flight of time as they were pitiless of the humble human drama of which they formed the scene. The fishermen returned from the Banks; the passing ships grew rare; then the long winter settled down, burying garden and village and heath-covered hills in snow. Even the headlands suffered the white rifts to curl into their crevasses, while all along the ocean's edge, where in summer there was foam, there was now a thin, white line of broken, floating ice. In the upper coves the ice was solid, and there the village boys and girls could skate. There, too, they could fish, cutting deep

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holes through the frozen surface, and standing, muffled and mittened, with blue noses and red cheeks, but always showing as much of the angler's pleasant patience as Walton in the nooks of the summer Thames.

To every one but Charity and Hagar the winter life was cheerful. Fathers and husbands and brothers and boys were back from hardship and danger; and in those homes from which the sea had snatched no important member for the last season or two there was spirit and leisure for domestic intercourse and humble merry-making. The freezing of the upper coves offered between Fisher's Grant, Mount Misery, and Peggy's Cove a direct line of travel, instead of the roundabout journey by land or the troublesome trip by sea one had to take in summer. In the intervals of winter work—drugget-weaving and net-making, wood-hauling and boat-building—there was thus space for courtship, friendly frolicking, and a little dancing. Now and then, on occasions of a wedding or a funeral, the jollity became too emphatic, but this was rare.

It was natural that at such reunions the presence of the Widow Penn in the cottage on the hill should have been the subject of remark. It was, in fact, the one topic from which all others depended, around which they circled, and to which they led up. It offered to the whole shore that which it had not had since

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the great days of the Lake Rossignol murder—a mystery; and every one felt, subconsciously, that it made the success of Sam Boutilier's Henny's annual hooking frolic when she gave it in December. This festivity usually took place in March, and was to the winter at Fisher's Grant what the race for the Grand Prix is in Paris, or Goodwood to the London season; but Mrs. Boutilier, with true social instinct, seized, this year, the propitious moment before the news had travelled all along the coast—while it was still unknown to some and fresh in the minds of all. She knew in advance that the "good time" of her frolic was assured.

"You wouldn't be askin' Mrs. Pennland?" Mr. Sam Boutilier said, tentatively, as he and his Henny talked over the invitations—"nor the widder, neither, I suppose?"

"Well, I should like to know why not," Mrs. Boutilier replied, tartly. "It 'ud be thought dreadful queer if I didn't. Charity Pennland's always come, and I don't see no reason why she shouldn't come again."

"I thought it might have a kind o' pryin' look—and Mrs. Penn a widder."

"A widder as is always dressed in green ain't much of a widder," Mrs. Boutilier laughed, significantly. "If every one was a widder as says they are, there'd have to be a awful lot o' husbands dead."

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“ Well, you don’t know as she *ain’t* a widder,” Mr. Boutilier insisted, “ and for to go for to ask ’em when any one can see as they wouldn’t want to come is what I call ondelikit.”

“ But it ’ud be a great deal ondelikiter,” Henny replied, shifting her ground with the ease of a woman to whom all the social fine points were familiar, “ to suppose as there was a reason for not asking ’em. When folks gives a frolic, Sam, they’ve nothing to do wi’ the feelings o’ them as is asked. It’s the feelings o’ them as isn’t asked that they’ve got to think on. And I say again, as Charity Pennland ’ud think it dreadful queer if she and her inmate wasn’t invited to come.”

Before this reasoning Mr. Boutilier could not hold out, and so the point was yielded.

“ I’ve decided to give my frolic before Christmas this year,” Sam’s Henny said to Charity when she went to see her next day. They sat in the spick-and-span kitchen. Charity, enveloped in a big, spotless apron, was scouring a copper vessel to the point of mirror-like cleanliness which is the standard along the Nova Scotian shore. Hagar was lying down in what Charity called “ father’s chamber,” now given up to the guest.

“ Ain’t that early?” Charity asked, without looking up from her task. She divined what was coming.

“ Yes, it’s early,” Mrs. Boutilier admitted; “ but

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I don't expect to be feeling well when March comes round, and so I thought I'd get it over in time."

"I've got some nice rags I could give you," Charity said, still intent on her work, "but I suppose you've plenty."

"I've plenty for the red pattern on a black ground, and I've pretty near enough for the small rug. It's a pattern I've had for a long time and never made use on—a green rose, wi' blue leaves, on a yaller ground. The pattern says a yaller rose wi' blue leaves on a green ground; but I thought t'other way round 'ud make it look more onnatrel and handsome."

"So it would," Charity agreed; "I've got some yaller I could let you have."

"Well, I thought you might be able to help me out wi' the pink and white for the settin'-room—seein' as you dress in black now. You must have a awful lot o' pink and white put away—you as was so fond o' them colors. It's a lovely pattern as I bought from Jonas Boutillier the last time he was by. It's a pink scroll on a white ground. It 'll show dirt awful, but it 'll be all the genteeler on that account. Besides, I mean to put it under the corner table, where it 'll be well seen and yet no one 'ull be sure to step on it. I thought you and the Widder Penn 'ud work at it, maybe—seein' as it's a partic'lar fancy bit."

Charity was not quick in such situations. She had no invention and little of that social adroitness which

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can meet any emergency. She could only say, bluntly, "Oh, we couldn't come," and blush as the words were uttered.

"Not come!" Sam's Henny cried, with an air of surprise as perfect as if she had not expected the reply. "Well, I might as well give up the frolic. I've never had a frolic wi'out you, not since I first began to give 'em. You ain't sick, be you?"

"No, I ain't sick, Henny."

"And you 'ain't lost no one? You haven't no one to lose—not since your a'nt was took."

"No, I haven't lost no one. As you say, I haven't no one to lose."

"And you haven't had news o' your man? I notice as you're always in black."

"I don't expect news of him, Henny. I've given that up. I've settled down into not expecting him no more." It required an effort to say this, but Charity made it valiantly. She was growing used to doing a hard thing easily.

"Well, I ain't goin' to press you against your will, Charity," Mrs. Boutilier said, with a sigh. "There's folks as knows their own business best, and you've got to let 'em be. But the Widder Penn 'ull come, I suppose?"

"Oh, she couldn't," Charity said, as bluntly and confusedly as before. "She ain't goin' to frolics now. She's in too much trouble."

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"It 'ud cheer her up a bit."

"Oh, she couldn't," Charity repeated, bending over the copper vessel and polishing with needless energy to hide her flaming cheeks.

"'Ain't her husband been dead long?" Henny questioned, relentlessly.

"No, he 'ain't."

"I supposed he must ha' been, and her in green," Mrs. Boutilier went on. "Why don't she wear black, then?"

"She's fond o' green," was all Charity could find to say, looking up helplessly.

"Well, I'll ask no questions and so I'll be told no lies, as the sayin' goes," Mrs. Boutilier said, with a suggestive laugh, as she rose to go away. "But it's the first time I ever see green weeds outside of a garding. Maybe it's the new style for widders. But if there *is* a widder," she added, in the Parthian manner, "anybody 'ud say it was you."

When her visitor had gone Charity stopped working and lifted her eyes absently to where Albert Edward and Alexandra gazed from their gilded frame.

"I ought to've thought o' that," she reflected. "A widder in green ain't lawful—and her in the state she's in. Anybody but me 'ud ha' seen it, but I'm that upset as the very hours o' the day don't seem natural no more. Now they'll be putting every kind

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o' two and two together, and what they don't know they'll not be slow to make up. They'll find out as how my husband deserted me before he died—me that was so faithful to him. They'll find out as how the child that's to come is his child, and that Soldier Penn was only William Pennland. I'll be shamed. We'll all be shamed. If Hagar goes down, I must go down wi' her, and William's name 'ull be dragged in the dust. I must find a way out."

She sat long and pondered. She was not accustomed to heroic thinking and so the task was hard. But little by little light broke in on her and the way grew clear.

"I ain't used to play-actin'," she said to herself, at last, "and I can't tell lies. But my husband mustn't be dead. I can't let myself mourn him. Nobody must be let know that he fell so far as to betray this poor girl, and that he's the baby's father."

In the afternoon, when Hagar was lying down again, Charity summoned up resolution to open the cedar chest, on which the cover had closed last in the previous August. There, on the top, was the sandalwood box in which were her treasures. She opened it and took out her wedding-ring.

"I'll not wear it," she thought. "I said it 'ud never go on again till he put it on hisself, and it's too late for that."

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But she fastened it to a long black ribbon, and, hanging it round her neck, hid it in her bosom.

“It can’t do no harm to no one there,” she said, “and Hagar need never know it.”

Then she drew out the pretty, flimsy frocks she thought she had done with forever. The very sight of the tender colors smote her like pleasant memories turned to pain.

“It ’ull be as if I was dressed up as the ghost of my own old happiness; but I’ve got to do it. It’s for William’s sake and all our sake. They mustn’t be let think he’s dead or that he ever did harm to any one. It’s hard that I can’t even have the pleasure o’ mourning him.”

When they were all taken out she gathered them in her arms. “They’ll have to be aired,” she said. “Sam’s Henny ’ud know in a minute if they smelled o’ the chest, as they’d been put away for good. I don’t want no one to think as I’ve worn black for anything but fancy or the style.”

Later in the day she went into her own room and spread her best black gown on the bed.

“It ’ll have to be took in there,” she said, critically, as she looked at it in every light, “and took up there. I wish Mrs. Music was here. She’s a dreadful good hand to fit. It’s a pity,” she added, as she seized the scissors, “but it’s got to be. It seems as if she was born to take everything from me. I can’t even have

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my sorrow. If the Lord had given me a crown I suppose she'd have to wear it."

Then the scissors slid slowly up the seam with a sharp, spluttering, crackling sound, like the firing of infinitesimal musketry.

XVIII

A FEW days later the hooking frolic was in full festal cry. Long before mid-day a procession of wood-sleds and box-sleds had begun crossing the ice of the upper cove, while many a sturdy pilgrim, in his best ill-fitting homespun, came on foot. The men accompanied their wives and sisters, but, being unable "to hook," they were not expected at the scene of revelry till late in the afternoon. The ladies thus got their *mauvais quart d'heure* over early, while the gentlemen found means of passing the time agreeably, seated about the stove in Sandy Boutilier's workshop. Here an unfinished boat received genial criticism from connoisseurs in the art of building.

"Looks as if she'd set very low in the water, Sandy," old Amos Schlagenweit observed, as he stumped round the object of attention, filling his pipe the while. "But p'r'aps you don't ever mean to load her."

"I should say," came from Reuben Jolimœurs—a big, red-bearded fisherman—"as every time you stepped into the bow she'd go down by the stern."

"That 'ud be better than to go down both ends to-

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gether," said Sam Boutilier, standing with his back to the nearly red-hot stove.

"I'd be afraid o' that, Sandy," Israel Schlagenweit remarked.

"You wouldn't be likely to take out in this boat anybody as you was fond on, Sandy—eh?" Long Tom Jolimœurs asked, with an air of feigned anxiety.

"No," Sandy puffed, good-naturedly, "not unless it was you, Tom."

"Or somebody as had took a prize for swimming," Black David Boutilier added, with a sardonic laugh.

"I can swim," piped up Hen Jolimœurs—a slim young man with a treble voice, a beaklike nose, and a receding chin—"I can swim. So if anybody likes I'll take her out on a trial trip. Have a drink, boys?" he asked, as, with a comprehensive glance at the company, he drew a flask from his pocket.

"Is that a bottle o' milk your mother has give you, Hen?" old Amos inquired, satirically.

"No, it's cold tea," the lad returned, with ready impertinence.

"Then you'd better keep it for your breakfast," the old man answered, with a haughty frown. "No one doesn't want that kind o' cold tea in this workshop—and us on our way to a frolic. Is this here boat meant to be a whaler, Sandy," he continued, unwilling to let a pleasant subject drop, "or a birch-bark canoe?"

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"She've the best p'int's o' both," put in Israel Schlagenweit. "She be as heavy as the one, and as easy to tip as t'other."

"You're all dreadful smart, boys," Sandy said, at last, between puffs at his pipe, "but you ain't smart enough. You can see as this boat ain't a natrel, every-day boat, but you can't see why."

"I can," Hen Jolimœurs cried, in his sharp treble. "It's a model as you're goin' to send to next year's cattle show."

"Now, this boat," Sandy went on, calmly, "ain't built for the water at all. It's to have flowers growed in it in Mrs. Pennland's garding."

There was a general shout, and it was felt that Sandy had scored.

"With the green widder a-tending on 'em," Hen Jolimœurs called out again. "Your wife ain't sickly, Sandy, but it never does no harm to look ahead. There's old uncle Amos here, as they say had spoke for his second wife afore he was married to his first."

"And who might this green widder be?" old Amos asked, hastily, preferring to let the impudent Hen go unpunished for the moment rather than to dwell on a delicate incident in his own career.

"Them as knows 'ull be best able to answer you, Amos," Long Tom replied, with significant looks around, "but it ain't me. What I've hearn tell I'll

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not repeat—not unless I was pressed very hard to do it.”

There was a mystery in young Long Tom's air that at once awoke attention.

“If pressin' is all you want, Tom,” said Israel Schlagenweit, jovially, “I'll do it for you. I'll press you till every bone is squeezed out o' your body.”

“Well, I ain't goin' to tell,” Long Tom repeated, doggedly. “I might be had up for a witness, for anything I know.”

There was a general movement of chairs, and a drawing nearer to Long Tom. A man who might be “had up for a witness” was naturally a person of interest. There was an expectant silence, during which Long Tom slowly emptied and refilled his pipe, and made the most of a moment during which he drew the eyes of all.

“Might it be anything you hearn say when you was on the *Sea-Dog*?” Amos ventured, at last.

“Well, I ain't goin' to tell,” Long Tom said again. “I ain't goin' to be had up if I can help it.”

“Couldn't you just fling us a rope, Tom?” Black David suggested. “Then we might climb into the thing ourselves, like.”

Tom started with a surprise tinged with horror.

“Don't you talk about ropes to me,” he said, in a low, hoarse whisper. “It makes me creep, it do.

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Ropes ain't always used to *save* life." The emphasis on the penultimate word caused another movement, and a still closer drawing about the man who held the key to so much mystery. It certainly seemed as if history were going to repeat itself and the days of the Lake Rossignol murder to return.

"Pooh! pooh!" Sam Boutilier ejaculated. "It can't be that bad, man. The green widdler is a harmless little body, whatever else she be—and that ain't my business nor yourn."

"Them as thinks so is welcome to think so," Long Tom said, loftily. "'Tain't me as 'll take t'other side. But I'll say this much, boys, that when we was on the *Sea-Dog* we put into a place called Golden Cove."

"I know it," Israel Schlagenweit shouted; "a little coal-minin' village under Cape Freels. Why, I sailed once wi' a chap as hailed from down by there. We always called him the Greek, because hardly no one but me could come by his name. Bein' a bit of a scholard I could always toss him off *Levanti*, as if it had been born on my tongue."

Long Tom leaped to his feet.

"'Sh—!" he hissed, with dramatic prolongation of the sound. "You might be overheard and had up for a witness as well as me."

"I'd like to be," Israel declared, stoutly. "Then I'd find out what the deuce is goin' on. I'd tell 'em

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all I knew about this Levanti. He was a big, black chap, wi' hair like a Injun's, and was drownded in a gale off the Magdalens. I ain't afraid to speak out, witness or no witness."

"That ain't him," Long Tom groaned, in an accent of relief, as he sank into his chair again. "But do you remember this? Did he feature the green widder?"

"Mind you, you're on oath, Isr'el," Hen Jolimœurs creaked, warningly.

"Well," Israel answered, with some hesitation, "I'd be willin' to say he did. I 'ain't ever seen her, but from what I've hearn tell o' her I'd say as they looked near enough alike to be two twins."

"That settles it," Long Tom cried, with a despairing gesture. "I'll be had up for a witness if I don't take care. I'll not say another word."

"But you've gone so far now," Hen Jolimœurs protested, "that if you don't tell us the whole thing we can go over to Harrietsfield and lodge information agin you, like the man what helped Jack Innis steal Judge Borrodaile's boat."

"Come, now, Tom," Black David threatened, "you've gone too far to draw back. Out wi' it, or we'll make it harder for you in the end."

Long Tom glanced helplessly about, and then began:

"Mind you, boys," he said, huskily, "what I says

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I says because you force me to it, and not through any will o' my own."

"All right, Tom, we know that," Sandy Boutilier said, encouragingly. "Shove her off. Let her go. We'll sail wi' you whatever port you're makin' for."

"Well, what I heard say at Golden Cove was this—that a man named Michael Levanti had been found shot in his own woods, not very far from Golden Cove Mines. First, nobody didn't know who did the deed. Then, little by little it came over folks down there as how he'd had a daughter as was mighty took up wi' a soldier named Penn just about that time. Suppose the young couple wanted the old man's money, says the folks, what 'ud ha' been easier than to give him a ping-ping in the back, some day when he wasn't lookin'? The daughter is takesome enough, says they, but as lawless as a young she wild-cat."

"That 'ud be so," old Amos corroborated. "Why, it 'ud be like the woman and two children as was found dead in the cabin up by Lake Rossignol fifteen year ago. Do you mind, boys?"

"No, it wouldn't, Uncle Amos," Hen Jolimœurs said, disrespectfully. "Shut up. Go on, Tom."

"I'll shut up you," Uncle Amos began, testily, but a general expression of disapproval silenced him.

"Well, the more they talked it over," Long Tom went on again, "the more nat'el it seemed as it must be the girl and the soldier. Then one day not long

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afore we was at Golden Cove, a cousin o' the man as was shot—Demetr'us Levanti by name—spoke up, and says he, 'Friends and fellow-countrymen,' says he, 'and likewise natives o' the same shore what I be,' says he, 'I've got a secret.' Well, they was all agog to know what the secret was, thinkin' it must have something to say to the shootin' o' Michael Levanti. 'It's a awful secret,' says Demetr'us; and they says, 'What is it?'

"That's what I'd say," Israel declared. "I don't hold wi' no man shakin' a secret in your face and not tellin' of you what it is."

"Nor me, neither," old Amos agreed. "I've sailed wi' men as 'ud make your blood b'ile, a-hintin' all the v'yage as they knowed something as they wouldn't tell; and when you'd sniggled and snagged yourself every way to find it out 'twasn't worth the knowin'."

"Well, this was," Long Tom spoke up, briskly, with a suspicion that his wares were being depreciated. "This was worth knowin'; and if any man says contrary, he'll lie."

"I don't say contrary, man," Uncle Amos cried. "I don't say contrary to nothing. I say as all secrets is worth hearin', and especially when it's about who shot anybody."

Here the company protested against the interruption, and Long Tom went on again.

"Says Demetr'us Levanti, 'Me and my pore cousin

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Michael had a fallin'-out about some timber I'd felled on land what he said was his. For a matter o' six months and more we didn't speak. Then, one day,' says he, 'when I'd been to confession, the priest told me to go over to the Old Shore road and make it up.' Them Levantis belongs to Papery, like Injuns and Frenchmen," Long Tom explained. "Howsomever," he continued, "Demetr'us went over and, accordin' to his own showin', when he'd gone into Michael's woods he saw his cousin a-cuttin' down of a tree. Next thing he heard a shot, and Michael Levanti throwed the axe into the air with a awful yell and fell back dead."

"And what did Demetr'us do then?" Reuben Jolimeurs asked.

"He run away," Long Tom explained. "He said as how he didn't know but what the next shot 'ud be for him, and so he made hisself as scarce as he could. But just as he was on the trot he see Soldier Penn and the Levanti girl a-sneakin' through the woods wi' the gun still smokin' in their hand. 'I don't go for to say as they did it,' says Demetr'us; 'but that's what I saw, and I leaves every one to make up their own mind.'"

"Well, I wouldn't," Israel declared. "I'd jail 'em."

"That's what the folks said at Golden Cove," Long Tom replied. "Says they, 'We'll jail 'em. They

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ain't safe to be at large.' And so, after a bit, they makes up a gang to go over to the Old Shore road and take 'em alive or dead."

"And did they ketch 'em?" Sandy asked.

"Not them," Long Tom answered, with a hollow laugh. "It was too late. When they got there the cottage in the woods was as empty as a old oyster-shell; and it wasn't till weeks after that they found out as how Soldier Penn, haunted by the ghost o' the man he'd shot, had drunk hisself to death and been buried reg'lar."

"And what about the girl?" came from several of the company at once.

"Well, there was two or three stories about her; but the one as was most believed was as how she'd been embezzled away by a kind o' gypsy woman dressed up so as to figure a fine lady from town. But I can tell you, boys, that when I arrove here in the *Sea-Dog* and found a young woman as anybody 'ud know for a Levanti ten miles off, and her goin' by the name o' Widder Penn—well, it's give me a out-and-out turn, it has, and I don't feel a well man since. I 'ain't slep' for nights at a time wi' the fear o' bein' had up for a witness."

A good deal of sympathy was expressed for Long Tom's state of mind, and most of those present confessed that under the circumstances they would have felt the same. There was a general impression that a

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new, strange element had come into the life of Fisher's Grant, and that it behooved the calmer heads of the community to act warily.

"What I says," old Amos stated, judicially, "is this—that we should be told off, two by two, to watch her night and day. That's what they did in the mutiny on the *Water-Witch*, twenty-five or thirty year ago, when this here Hen Jolimœurs' grandfather was put in irons."

"That wouldn't do," Israel exclaimed, before the impatient Hen had time to retort; "nobody 'ud be willing to take the settin'-up at night. What I says is, that we should form a gang and take her over to the justice o' the peace at Harrietsfield. Then we could all take a oath. I've always had a wish to get inside of a court o' law."

"A fisherman in a court o' law," said Sandy Boutilier, in a tone of quiet scorn, "'ud be a good deal like a child in a room full o' loaded firearms. I don't hold much wi' the law myself. Pretty near the whole on it is to get off them as have done what they hadn't ought to, just because no one see 'em do it. My belief is that we should question her ourselves, calm like, and make her tell us how she did it, and what her feelings was, and whether she ain't afeard of his sperrit comin' back to her. I 'ain't ever had the chance to converse wi' any one as shot their own father. It 'ud be kind o' interestin' to get at their insides, like—

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especially when it's a wench as makes you feel as if tea was grog every time she looks at you."

This view of keeping the mystery to themselves and treating it psychologically met with more approval than might have been expected. It was still under discussion when little Jinny Boutilier, with big, shy eyes, and a finger in her mouth, appeared in the doorway to say that her mother would be pleased if they would all come in to supper. There was a slow emptying of pipes and a gradual movement out into the early winter twilight. As the irregular procession plodded through the snow, old Amos hobbled from one to another with a word of warning.

"Not a whisper to the women, mind you, boys. They 'ain't got the head to deal wi' a thing like this. It 'ud upset them awful; and, belike it 'ud take their minds away from their work."

Meanwhile this opinion was being falsified by the feminine activity displayed during the earlier stages of the frolic. As if in flat contradiction of her husband's theory, Mrs. Amos Schlagenweit was proving that a woman could think out weighty matters and work at the same time; while other ladies were not less clever along the same lines. In the brightly lighted "settin'-room" busy fingers plied the pretty art of "hooking"; while equally busy tongues made comments on the leading topic of the day. The company was divided into three bands—the larger num-

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ber being about the big canvas, the red on a black ground, in the centre of the room. The canvas itself being tightly stretched on a frame, was supported on the backs of chairs at each end, while the lady-workers sat four on a side. Baskets of materials were within easy reach of all. One set of ladies worked at the red pattern and one set at the black ground. The art of hooking is a delicate one. It consists in drawing the dyed strips of stuff through the canvas, evenly and compactly, so as to produce an effect like that of a highly magnified Brussels carpet. The work requires that mingling of deftness, precision, and taste in which the ladies of Fisher's Grant and Peggy's Cove excel. Mrs. Amos Schlagenweit had twice taken a prize for the beauty of the rugs she had sent to the county cattle show.

"Tastier patterns than them three I never see," she said, approvingly, now to Sam's Henny, who, with her daughter Mary, kept going and coming through the house, preparing the more material feast in the kitchen.

"I'm sure I'm glad you think so," Henny answered, looking pleased, as she handed down the best china from the bookcase. "There's few as has your knowledge o' hooked rugs."

"And yet," said Mrs. Reuben Jolimœurs—a sad, thin woman, whom everybody knew to be hard to please—"I should ha' thought as you'd ha' chose

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different colors from these I'm workin' on. A pink scroll on a white ground 'ud be fitter to frame and hang up for a picter than to lay on the floor and be s'iled every time it's looked at."

"Well, I can afford it," Sam's Henny answered, with a toss of the head. "There's them as 'ud never pick a flower for fear it 'ud fade; but I says have your things nice and wear 'em out and then get more; and I has my rugs accordin'."

"If any one wants to see a picter they'd better look at this!" cried jovial Mrs. Sandy Boutilier, from another corner of the room. "A green rose wi' blue leaves is something I don't ever expect to see outside of a hooked rug or the better land."

"Whatever could ha' give you the idee of a green rose, Henny?" inquired Miss Ellen Schlagenweit, the only old maid on the shore.

"I know," answered pert Miss Nancy Jolimœurs, from her work at the red on the black ground; "it was seein' a widder in green weeds."

This apt reply was like the touch of the fuse to a well-prepared system of fire-works. There was no immediate, general explosion, but rockets of wit went up in the air—one, two, three at a time, mounting gracefully, bursting easily and falling in showers of laughter. Then came arabesques of anecdote, Catherine-wheels of gossip, and dazzling designs in theory, all throwing a bright but blinding light on the

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identity of the Widow Penn. The brisker the conversation waxed the more nimbly fingers flew. The pink scroll came out of its white setting as a mayflower shows itself through a pall of melting snow. The deep-red pattern—vaguely suggestive of an acanthus leaf—took form on its black background and suggested flame against the sky of a pitch-dark night. The green rose with blue leaves trailed on its yellow bed, like a flower from some mystic land unentered yet by human fancy. Amos Schlagenweit's supposition that the women might be diverted from their work received fuller and fuller refutation as the daylight waned.

"My belief is this," said Mrs. Amos, as she "filled in" a rose leaf in pale blue: "I says as she's some relation o' Charity Pennland's as has gone to the Boston States and got herself into trouble. Charity has took her here and is giving her shelter till it's over."

"Yes," reasoned Mrs. Reuben Jolimœurs, with a pinching of her thin lips, "but what 'ud be your grounds?"

"I haven't got any," Mrs. Amos avowed, bravely. "I ain't one o' them as must always have grounds for what they believes. I just believes it and that's all."

"That mightn't be other folks's way, you know, Tilly," Mrs. Reuben said, with a wintry smile, as she worked a bit of pink into the foliage of her scroll.

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“ Well, it’s mine,” Mrs. Amos declared, stoutly. “ There’s them as ’ud want grounds for believin’ that the sun ’ll rise to-morrow morning.”

“ And I suppose,” Mrs. Reuben argued, “ as it could be given ’em if anybody was wise enough to do it.”

“ Yes, but nobody ain’t,” Mrs. Amos answered, triumphantly. “ And I say, and say again, as what I believes, I believes—grounds or no grounds. And any one as can prove me wrong is welcome to do it.”

“ I agrees with you, Tilly,” said Mrs. Sandy Boutilier, bringing into existence, as she spoke, a pea-green rose in more than natural luxuriance of bloom. “ There’d be no livin’ at all if folks had to give reasons for all the idees they has. It ’ud be like the Methodisses, as thinks you ought to be able to prove your religion out o’ Scriptur’; and anybody must know as that couldn’t be so. Now what I holds about this Hagar is that she’s a-hidin’ of herself here in Fisher’s Grant for some mischief as she’s done. Charity Pennland is that soft-hearted as almost anybody could deceive her. She’s as full o’ kindness as a rose is full o’ scent, and I say it’s a pity. Goodness is all very well, says I, but it don’t need to make you simple.”

“ If I’ve said once I’ve said twenty times,” Miss Ellen Schlagenweit exclaimed, pausing with her hook in the air to accompany her words with gesture, “ that

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Charity Pennland ought to be spoke to. She's always had the fault o' sperritorial pride—a-dressing of herself better than her neighbors when she'd fitter far be thinking of her latter end. Now she's brought into Fisher's Grant them as I wouldn't stoop to name, which seems to me a come-down for people as thought theirselves so high."

The principle of free speech advanced by Mrs. Amos commended itself to the greater part of the assembly as being consistent with common-sense. It relieved the conversation from restrictions, and sent the fancy off on unaccustomed flights. Those who had no theory regarding the Widow Penn were at once inspired to seek one, while the absence of necessity for finding "grounds" gave equal weight to all opinions.

Hagar was a girl who had run away from home; she was the wife of a deserter in the army whom Charity was feeding in some recess among the hills; she was the only survivor of a shipwreck; she was a fugitive from a convent; she was a gypsy; she was a white girl stolen in childhood by the Indians and now brought back again to the outskirts of civilized life.

"And I thinks everybody wrong," Mrs. Sam Boutilier announced, when, her preparations being nearly ended, she felt herself free to speak. "I say as we'll never get to the bottom o' who she is till we get to the

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bottom o' why Charity Pennland all of a sudden dresses herself in black—her as was always as gay-colored as a humming-bird—and to the bottom of why this widder wears nothing but green. I believes there is a widder, but I ain't ready to swear which it is. There's more in it all than meets the eye, and the key to it 'll be found in—who do you think?"

There was that expectant hush which is always an inspiration to an orator with a sense for drama.

"In William Pennland," Mrs. Boutilier replied to her own question. "Where is he? Is he livin'? Is he dead? Is he comin' back? Is he never comin' back? Tell me them things and I'll tell you who is Hagar Penn. Now, Jinny," she continued, falling back with admirable effect into her ordinary tone of speech, "you can run over to your uncle Sandy's workshop and tell 'em I'll be pleased if they'll all come in to supper."

Sam's Henny's view was received with a murmur of applause. It brought into the case new elements, probable, exciting, and capable of many combinations. Before the gentlemen arrived a whole tragedy was evolved, in which William Pennland was set in a lurid light, while Charity and Hagar played the parts now of victims, now of heroines, now of dupes. A good literary critic would have been sorry to see so much of the constructive faculty wasting itself at a

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hooking frolic; and, strange to say, there was here and there more than one touch of the truth.

“Not a word to the men, girls,” Mrs. Amos whispered, as the advent of the gentlemen drew nigh. “Men is awful gossipers when once you start ’em; and I don’t believe in taking away no one’s character—not unless you’re obliged to.”

Supper was consequently eaten with some constraint of intercourse, though the sense of taking part in a mystery was better than merriment. Not to be able to utter a word, through fear of betraying what one knew, was a silence more eloquent than speech. It was felt that everything was working up to some strange climax in which all present would be involved. It was in vain that Sam and Henny exhorted their guests to eat plenty and make themselves at home. There was a perceptible loss of appetite on the part of the ladies, and even the men toyed with their food as though Long Tom’s fear of being had up for a witness were infectious. As supper drew towards its close expectancy hung over the party like a pall. Henny wondered how they would ever have the spirit afterwards for kiss-in-the-ring, reels, and Copenhagen.

Suddenly there was a sound at the door, then a fumbling at the latch. Some of the women gave a little screech; the men breathed hard. Then the door was thrown open, and on the threshold stood Charity

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Pennland. She was all in lavender and white; her cheeks were aglow with the frosty air, and her gray eyes shone with an unusual lustre. Her smile had all its old-time sweetness, and the dimples, which had almost disappeared of late, came back again.

“You didn’t expect me, Henny!” she cried, with a little laugh, “but I couldn’t help coming, after all, and I’ve brought with me Mrs. Penn.”

Charity moved into the room, and close behind her came Hagar in the solemn state of “widow’s weeds.” Green had given place to sable, and no detail was wanting to the costume. She had white cuffs on her wrists, a white cap on her hair, and white bands at her throat. She was a standing refutation of the hints that had been thrown out among the ladies—a living proof that she had had a husband, and that he, in very truth, was dead. As she stood looking shyly round about her with big, burning, pansy-colored eyes, there was not a woman present who did not feel obliged to reconstruct her theories; not a man to whom it did not seem, to quote Sandy Boutilier, “as if his tea was grog.”

“No one couldn’t be more delighted to see you both than what I be,” Henny exclaimed, with ready tact. “Do sit down and have some supper. There’s plenty left.”

She took Charity by one hand and Hagar by the other and led them towards the table.

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“No, thank you, Henny,” Charity explained. “We’ve had our supper. We’ve only come in for a minute. We oughtn’t to’ve come at all, but I couldn’t think o’ all the dear friends being so near me and not run in just to wish ’em well.”

There was a murmur of semi-articulate appreciation of Charity’s good-will, and then the company rose.

A few minutes later, in the “settin’-room,” Hagar found a corner where she could sit and silently survey a scene almost too brilliant for her unaccustomed eyes. She answered in monosyllables when any of the women spoke to her. The men only glanced at her furtively and confided to one another in low tones that they had never seen “a more takesome wench.”

“Poor thing!” Charity whispered to the friends who came crowding about her. “I had dreadful hard work to persuade her to come, but I knew it ’ud do her good and cheer her up.”

“She don’t seem like a body used to other folks’s ways,” said Mrs. Amos, insinuatingly. “Would it be the shock of her husband’s death as makes her that way?”

“Yes,” Charity answered; “he died awful quick, and she hadn’t been married to him a year. ’Twas Jonas Boutilier as brought me word that he was sick, and I went straight off to see him. I knew him well, years ago,” she continued, with a sigh. “It was at

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the time I was married and he used to come very frequent to the house where I met my husband. I was awful fond of him, too; and when I heard as he'd come back to these parts and had a young wife and was sick and all that, I couldn't help goin' to see him. When he died, me and Mrs. Music—that's Betsy Boutilier—persuaded her to come home along o' me and stop till her trouble's over. She's kind o' stunned like, with the change and all she's been through, so you mustn't take it amiss if you finds her strange."

Charity spoke sweetly, cheerfully, naturally. As she admitted, she was "not used to play-actin'," but she was making a great effort to save Hagar's honor and avert suspicion from William's name. When questions poured in upon her, she answered them in the tenor of what she had said before, and did her best to anticipate all idle tales.

"And your own man?" Mrs. Reuben Jolimœurs questioned, during a pause. "Haven't you had no tidings of him?"

Charity pulled herself together and brought all her powers of high comedy into action.

"I don't expect any, Jemima," she said, with an air of sad simplicity. "I've given it all up. If he was coming, he'd ha' been here by now. The Lord has taken him to Himself. I feel sure o' that, and I must just accept His will. I don't intend to put on crape,

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though, or mourn him. I've just passed, quiet-like, into not looking for him no more."

Charity and Hagar left the frolic early. As they were climbing the hill, through the snow, Hagar laughed.

"I'm his wife," she said. "My baby 'll be lawful born. It's known public now that you ain't nothing to him at all."

"Don't trample on me, Hagar," Charity pleaded. "If I give up everything to you before the world, you might have a little mercy on me when we're alone."

But Hagar only laughed again and went on her way.

Meanwhile, at the frolic, all tongues were loosed and every variety of opinion was expressed—"grounds or no grounds," according to the liberal principle Mrs. Amos had laid down.

XIX

THE winter was long in passing, but it passed. The snow was gone; the maple branches were turning red; the ice in the upper cove had broken up and floated out to sea; long converging lines of wild-geese had flown northward.

Charity was in her garden searching to see if, under the dead stalks of last year, the first hardy herald of summer had yet thrust its head above ground, when she espied Jonas Boutillier coming up the hill. She had not seen him for nearly three months, and she could not help blushing faintly.

“Poor fellow,” she said to herself; “he’s certainly faithful. No one can’t deny it.”

And yet she wondered by what new means she could divert the talk from the subject he liked best to pursue. She was glad to see him, though she dreaded the ingeniousness with which he made all the roads of conversation lead to Rome. But when he had reached the garden gate and they had greeted each other with their usual formalities she saw he had something on his mind.

“Have you just got back from your trip, Jonas?”

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Charity inquired, after she had asked about his health.

"Yes'm," he answered, absently. "And something has happened to me which 'ain't happened not since just afore my first wife died. Then I was expectin' on it, so it didn't take me by surprise. But this time it's fell on me right out o' the blue sky like, and I can't tell what to make of it."

"For goodness sake, what can it be? You look dreadful troubled."

"Well, I be, ma'am. I 'ain't slep' since I got back and found it waitin' for me."

"Was it alive?" Charity asked, in eager curiosity.

"No, ma'am, it was dead. But them things has a kind o' life as 'll often do you more harm than a wild animal."

"I can't think what in the world it is. Why don't you tell me?"

"Be you alone, ma'am?"

"Yes, except that Hagar is about somewhere. You needn't be afraid o' her. She won't come where there's a stranger."

"Well, I've got this, ma'am."

He drew from his pocket a letter, which he handed to Charity.

"I've never had but one before, and I don't want another," he continued. "There's ginerally bad luck in them things."

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“ But you haven’t opened it.”

“ What ’ud be the good, ma’am? I ain’t much of a scholard, and I couldn’t hardly tell what was in it. But if you could spell me a bit here and there I’d be obliged to you.”

“ Let’s sit down,” she said, and led the way to the bench at the cottage door, where the April sunshine was warm and cheering.

Charity opened the letter and studied it.

“ It’s from Mrs. Music,” she said, in answer to Jonas’s questioning attention.

“ Then it ’ll have bad news in it,” he observed, uneasily. “ Betsy wouldn’t write unless she had bad news to tell.”

“ I don’t think you’ll find it so, Jonas. She’s coming to see you.”

“ Comin’ to see me!” he cried, springing from his seat. “ What in the name o’ Peter is she coming to see me for?”

“ She seems to want to.”

“ Oh no, ma’am,” he said, with an incredulous smile, as he sat down again. “ It can’t be that. It must be something dreadful bad as ’ud bring her.”

“ Perhaps I’d better read you the letter?”

“ I don’t know as I can stand it, ma’am. I’m that upset already as I wouldn’t know whiskey-and-water from a dose o’ medicine. The thought o’ Betsy comin’ to see me has give me a turn as I’ll not get over

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for many a day. Wouldn't there be any way o' head-in' her off like?"

"She says she'll be here about the twenty-fifth o' April."

"And it's the twenty-second now. Oh, Lord! Oh, Lord! Whatever am I to do? There ain't a decent bed for her to lay on; and as for victuals, a bit o' b'iled shoe-leather 'ud be better than anything I've got laid in."

"Well, I could help you wi' all that. Me and Hagar 'ud go down and get the house ready, and lay in victuals, and do everything else, and welcome. Besides, when Mrs. Music comes it's likely as she'll be more wi' me than wi' you. I feel awful drawn to her, and so does Hagar."

The cloud lifted partially from Jonas's brow.

"That 'ud be more nor kind, ma'am. It 'ud take her off my hands like. I ain't used to females—onless I'm kind o' married to 'em. It's bad enough, then—except it was you, ma'am," he added, in courteous qualification.

"I'm sure I'm only too glad to do anything to pay the debt I owe you, Jonas."

"I hope you won't do that, ma'am. It's a great pleasure to feel as you're beholden to me. It's a tie between us, and I needn't tell you what that is—"

"Don't you think I'd better read you Mrs. Music's letter?" Charity insisted.

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“ Well, ma'am, if you must. I suppose I know the worst that's in it now. It's a ill wind as blows nobody good, and if it 'll bring you in and out o' my house, like as if you belonged there, then I'll be more contented like.”

“ It goes this way,” Charity began, hastily :

“ ‘ DEAR BROTHER,’ ” she read slowly, and with hesitation between the words—“ ‘ I now take my pen in hand to let you know I ain't well nor don't expect to be at my time o' life with swelled legs and me on my feet from dawn to dark pretty near every day what with the cooking and washing and poltry and piggs and me having to see to everything myself Thankful being not much more use about the farm than a stuffed fowl and him the oldest of the family now that his pore father is gone which for seeing after things and having everything done well there never was a better husband let the next best be who he be as me and Henry has said many a time since Henry came back from the banks and notice how Thankful lets the farm go to rack and ruin him doing his best but not having no head for nothing but books though never being encouraged in such foolishness by me nor yet his father and so he has made up his mind not to go to the banks this summer but stay at home and help Thankful on the farm which it is the Lord's mercy to have give me a son which knows how to

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manage without me being forever on his tracks and so what with my legs being swelled and me in need of a change of air I am taking doctor griggs advice and am going to see you reaching Fisher's Grant about april 25 jacob eisenhauer taking me of Hungry Island next time he goes by and the two boys rowing me out there and staying with me till jacob sends his boat to take me of so dont get anything extry as I shall do very well with what you have in the house your loving sister

“ ‘ MRS. SOLOMON MUSIC.

“ ‘ Thankful has writ this, me telling him what to say. If you aint at home when this comes leave the key with Mrs. Pennland and Ile be alright.’ ”

“ It's a nice letter,” Charity said, as she folded the sheet of paper and replaced it in the envelope, “ and it's well writ.”

“ Yes'm,” Jonas agreed, but with some hesitation ; “ it ain't as bad as it might be. I don't hold wi' letters as a ginerall thing ; but I'm one as 'ull try to find a mercy in pretty near everything. So if this 'ull only bring you in and out o' my house as if it belonged to you—which I wish it did—then I'll—”

“ I'll do everything I can to make Mrs. Music comfortable,” Charity assured him, “ and Hagar 'll be a wonderful help. She's got to be that handy

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about the house you'd hardly believe it. We'll both come—"

"The house is dreadful small, ma'am," Jonas hastened to warn her. "There'd hardly be room for so many at a time—and me there, too."

"Then we'll come when you ain't there," Charity replied, with unusual readiness.

By this introduction of a third person Jonas was perplexed and disappointed. It seemed to him the losing of an uncommon opportunity. He was not accustomed to the skill with which one woman will shelter herself behind the presence of another, and he went away with an uneasy feeling that Hagar was going to be an obstacle in his path.

"I shouldn't ha' expected it in Mrs. Pennland," he complained to himself as he went down the hill. "She ain't like Mrs. Beech, as knowed how to meet a man half-way and not put him to needless trouble. I'll be glad to have the wench gone."

When the *Leviathan* sailed into Fisher's Grant, just at sunset, a few days later, Jonas's little cottage was as bright and trim as Charity's own. The two women had spent three happy, fatiguing days sweeping, scraping, scouring, and otherwise covering up the traces of Jonas's five untidy years of widowhood.

"I declare, there's nothing so helpless as a man," Charity said to Hagar, as she flew hither and yon about the little dwelling. "Even a lower animal 'ull

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know how to keep its nest in order, but a man's eddication about a house is finished when he's left his cradle. The dust in them corners is that thick as you could almost grow cabbage in it."

Charity brought her own best rugs and spread them on the floor of the tiny "settin'-room"; she put up muslin curtains at the window; she carried down her father's rocking-chair; she stocked the house with linen, and she laid in stores of jam of her own making and of eggs from her own hens. Her best tea, her best tea-pot, and specimens of her best china—the white with the blue sprig—adorned Jonas's pantry shelves. It required an effort to take out the things she had kept for William and put them at the service of any one else—even of so honored a guest as Mrs. Music; but Charity made it bravely.

"I ain't going to be foolish about 'em, when they'll give pleasure to some one else," she said, as she gave the precious porcelain an unnecessary washing; but she could not prevent a tear falling into the water as the words passed through her mind. On her arrival Mrs. Music was astounded.

"I'd never ha' knowed the old place," she declared. "Why, you've got it done up that tasty as anybody 'ud think you was going to be married again."

"Queerer things has happened," Jonas said, in a significant tone.

"I hope it won't be another widder, then," his sister

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responded, quickly. "You're a dreadful hand for widders, having married two."

"I like 'em best; they're more broke in."

"Well, I'd have a change, if I was you. At your time o' life a nice old maid is what 'ud suit you. There's Ellen Schlagenweit 'ud take you and willin'—at least, that's what Jacob Eisenhauer tells me on the trip."

"Pish!" Jonas exclaimed, contemptuously. "She've a neck like a crane and she walks like a turkey, and she's got more grammar nor a minister. Now, what I want is a nice, soft, pretty woman, risin' towards forty, wi' a gray eye and a bloom on her cheek, and hair a-wavin' on her forehead—a body as 'ull kind o' purr whenever I come round, and 'ull never think o' nothing but me."

"You'll not find that in widders, then," Mrs. Music said, warningly, as she went into the "settin'-room" to take off her bonnet. "If I was you, I wouldn't fix my 'eart upon it, for you're sure to be disappointed."

"I wonder if she means anything?" he questioned, when she had closed the door. "I sometimes think as Mrs. Pennland ain't the woman I took her for. I thought that, now her man was gone, she'd rise at me like a fish at a bit o' worm; but she kind o' hangs back. I never see a woman act so before. Ginerally a man like me has only got to heave in sight to have 'em all

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frills and flutter; but she keeps you at arm's-length, and pushes that Hagar at you as if 'twas her you wanted. It ain't nat'rel; that's what I say."

In the evening, when brother and sister had finished supper and were sitting by the kitchen stove, which Charity had polished till it resembled a large black pearl, the conversation turned naturally on Charity and Hagar.

"They've been in my mind terrible all winter," Mrs. Music said. "And now, as spring was coming on, it didn't seem as if I could leave that pore thing to go through everything alone."

"Which pore thing do you mean, Betsy?"

"Both on 'em. I can't hardly say which has got the heaviest task before her. I've been thinkin' and plannin' and contrivin' for 'em ever since they left the Old Shore road, till at last it didn't seem to me as I could set still any longer."

"So that's the reason you've come?"

"Everything has happened providential, brother; and it seemed to me as if I was led. First, Hennery made up his mind to stay on the farm this season, and I knowed he'd look after Thankful. Pore Thankful is that dull as I can't make out how he can be a son o' mine. Not but what's he's a good boy; but he makes me feel like a hen as has hatched a owl. Then my legs swelled so as Dr. Griggs said I should have to be took off 'em. Says he, 'The two boys 'ull have to

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see to the farm this year, and you must get a rest.' Then the idee came to me as I'd take a trip along shore wi' Jacob Eisenhauer, and be wi' Charity Pennland through what's to happen. I wanted to, awful; and when my legs swelled it seemed as if the Lord had p'inted out the way."

"'Tain't every one as 'ud take their affliction like that, Betsy," Jonas said, in a spirit of commendation. "You're dreadful improved since you was a girl. Solomon must ha' wore you down and made you think o' better things. I notice you've got a good deal o' my sperrit now. Well, I suppose you're lookin' for your reward in another life nor this."

"Oh, I'm not thinking much about that. I never was one o' them as 'ull reckon up the interest on their savings and add it to the principal six months afore it's due. I've known folks as 'ud be two years ahead in their calculatin', and then feel as the bank owed 'em money. I'm willing to take what the Lord 'll send me in His good time, and I know it 'll be something good, just as He's always give me. But as for doing this or that expectin' a reward, I forgets to think of it."

"That don't seem to me the right kind o' religion, Betsy," Jonas said, in a tone of gentle reproof. "But I suppose it's the best you can do. For the matter o' that, I never see a woman yet as could get hold o' religion by the right end, and I don't believe it's in 'em—unless it was Mrs. Pennland."

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“ I wouldn’t go for to set Charity Pennland up above the rest o’ her perfession, brother, if I was you.”

“ What !” Jonas cried, bridling. “ Do you mean to say she ain’t a fine woman ?”

“ Oh, dear, no.”

“ Well, do you mean to say as she ain’t the finest there is ?”

“ She’s one o’ the finest. I’m sure o’ that. She’ve only got to know a thing is right and she’ll do it if she died. She’s one o’ them sweet, slow women as always needs to have some one go ahead wi’ a lantern for her to see the way ; but, once she sees it, temptation wouldn’t take her out of it. She’s a lovely natur’, nobody needn’t say different, but I wouldn’t keep dwellin’ on it, brother, if I was you. It’s no use fightin’ against Ellen Schlagenweit if she’s the woman you’re meant to marry—not if she walked like ten turkeys. If it’s meant, it’s meant—”

“ Well, it ain’t meant,” Jonas burst out, in rebellion against this complacent fatalism.

“ You can’t tell that, brother. She ’ain’t had a fair chance yet. Jacob Eisenhauer says as she’s that set on you as she can’t hardly hear your name mentioned wi’out falling on the floor in a fit. I’ve known men marry in a good deal more onlikely way than for you to take Ellen Schlagenweit—”

“ But I ain’t goin’ to,” Jonas cried again.

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“ Well, perhaps you’re not, brother; only I seem to’ve felt it coming this long spell back, and I ain’t often mistook. And if so be as it’s right for you to do it—”

“ Well, what then?” Jonas roared, savagely.

“ Then,” Mrs. Music went on, calmly, “ you’d better resign yourself to your situation, and not make yourself wretched a-hopin’ for what you’ll never get.”

“ Who says I’ll never get it?” he asked, hoarsely.

“ Nobody, brother. I’m only a-warnin’ on you. I wouldn’t have you be like Jimmy Greenfield, as so set his mind on being owner of a four-masted schooner that he couldn’t work his farm. Whether he ploughed or whether he planted he was always a-pinin’ and a-grievin’ for that four-masted schooner that he never got, and so he died poor.”

The parable produced on Jonas a visible effect. He grumbled something inarticulate and crouched over the stove. Presently he grew morose and silent, and the conversation was not resumed that night.

XX

"YOU'LL feel different when it's born, dear," Mrs. Music said when, a few days after her arrival, she and Charity were at work in the garden. They were clipping off last year's stalks and gathering up last year's leaves. Outside the garden gate a fire was burning like that in the Valley of the Son of Hinnom. All that winter had not transmuted into sustenance for the soil was being burned like an offering to the god of spring.

"It don't seem to me as if I ever could feel different," Charity said, as she bent over a big root of peony. "I've grown fond o' Hagar, I don't say contrary. And she's grown fond o' me, I think, in a kind o' savage way. She's learned to sew and she's got neat about the house and about her clothes. She talks to me quite pleasant now, and we takes turns at reading the Bible out loud. But when I think as she's to be the mother o' William's child it seems to me as if the sunshine was turned into blackness. I'm a wicked woman, Mrs. Music, and it's no use to deny it. I can't forgive her that. I can't be willing to have that child come under my roof and share my

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shelter. Hagar don't know as I feel so. I've hid it from her, and I've seemed to myself a deceiving creature because I've done so. But I haven't had the heart to tell her—and her having suffered so much.”

“I know what you've been through, dear,” Mrs. Music said, affectionately. “I've been saying to myself all winter that if I was in your place what I'd feel most 'ud be her being the mother of his child. But you'll feel different, I know. I never see a woman yet as didn't have joy that a man was born into the world, as the Good Book tells us, the minute they'd got a baby—anybody's baby—in their arms.”

“A good woman might,” Charity admitted; “but I ain't good, Mrs. Music. My heart is full o' blackness and bitterness, and the worst is that Hagar thinks I'm kind. I'd almost feel better if she knew me as I am.”

“Still, I think you'll feel different,” Mrs. Music insisted; and a few weeks later she was justified.

It was the middle of May, and everything that had been brown was turning green. In the morning sunshine the uplands were fresh and sparkling. Here and there a wild-cherry-tree, all in shivering white, shook in the spring wind like a woodland ghost. The lone maple at the gate was putting forth its first tender leaves of many shaded reds. The sea dashed against the rocks with a kind of monstrous glee. Over the brows of the headlands there crept a tinge that

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was not verdure so much as the palest possible hint of it. Charity was in the garden, restless and unhappy. She could not have said whether her strongest emotion were hope or fear.

“You’ll be better out in the air, dear,” Mrs. Music had said an hour or two before. “You’re too upset to help us here. I’ll come and tell you when it’s all over.”

Charity went out, but she could not occupy herself. The little beds were squared and raked and all ready for sowing. The sea-shells bordering the paths were straightened after the winter’s frost. The hardier perennials were sending up healthy, pulpy shoots. But Charity could not look at anything. She wandered about aimlessly, listening for every sound, and sometimes wringing her hands from sheer anxiety.

Suddenly, when she was looking away from the cottage, there came a joyful cry.

“It’s all over, thank God,” rang out from Mrs. Music’s lips, “and it’s a little boy!”

Charity stood still, as if turned to stone. She noticed that the robins and bobolinks were singing around her, but she had no anthem of her own. She could not even echo Mrs. Music’s wholesome, maternal joyousness.

“You can come in and see it,” Mrs. Music called again. “It’s a right proper child—as strong and well made as ever I see.”

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“I’ll have to see it,” Charity said to herself. “It’s no use trying to put it off.”

Mrs. Music had hurried into the house again, and Charity dragged herself to the door.

“She’s resting now,” Mrs. Music whispered. “Henny is with her. The baby is in your bed. You can go in. You can’t frighten him.”

“The minute has come,” Charity said to herself again, as she went into her room. “I’ve got to face it.”

Slowly, very slowly, she approached her bed, and there on the pillow was a little head all downy with dark hair. It was so soft, so sweet, so pretty, so appealing that Charity felt herself overwhelmed by a tumultuous inrush of new emotions. Here was the child whose coming she had dreaded—the child she had almost hated before its birth! The first glance at it in its lovely helplessness had created a new world for her. It lay on her own pillow; it seemed to belong to her; it was the element she had craved in her life. It had come; it was there. “And it’s mine,” she said, half aloud, in eager, covetous desire to clasp the little creature to her barren breast.

“It ain’t what I expected,” she whispered to herself. “I don’t feel what—I did feel.”

She turned and closed the door behind her. She wanted no one, not even Mrs. Music, to witness her bewilderment. She came back to the bed on tiptoe,

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and, stooping, looked into the tiny face she had not yet seen.

“ Oh, my God, my God !” she gasped.

Her emotion almost overpowered her. The little creature lay gazing at her with big, wide-open eyes—with sweet, blue, kindly eyes—with William’s eyes—with William’s eyes as they had been when she knew him first, in the days when he was still boyish and good-natured and light-hearted. The little mouth, like an opening flower, was William’s mouth. The little nose, like a pink pearl, was William’s nose. The ears, the eyebrows, the forehead, the very shape of the head, were all William’s.

“ It’s him,” she said. “ It’s William born again and become a little child. It’s William born sweet and innocent and without sin, and able to begin all over again.”

Then she looked into the baby eyes once more. They were such wise, solemn, knowing eyes! They seemed to be gazing at her out of the abysses of eternity. It was like William and yet not like William. It was like William, but a William transformed, renewed, redeemed. Charity clasped her hands and stood as if in ecstasy.

“ Oh, baby, baby !” was all she could find to say ; but her heart was singing pæans. “ Oh, baby, baby ! Oh, baby ; dear little baby !” she repeated, while the child gazed at her in sweet, sublime solemnity. She

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forgot Mrs. Music; she forgot there was a world outside; she even forgot Hagar.

“Oh, my baby, my baby!” she kept repeating. “All my love has come back again,” she went on. “All my happiness is here once more. I can live now. I can work now. I can see God’s mercy. I can trust Him again.”

Softly and tenderly she drew back the coverlet and looked at the baby form. It was, as Mrs. Music said, “a right proper child,” and every limb was perfect. Charity covered it again and went down on her knees. She did not pray; she did not cry; she only let her heart go out in a strong, inarticulate hymn of thankfulness.

“She remembereth no more the anguish for joy that a man is born into the world,” were the words in which she sang her *Magnificat anima mea Dominum*.

“I’ve had the anguish; now I’ve got the child,” she said, as she rose from her knees and turned to go out to Mrs. Music.

“But it ain’t your child.” The thought smote in upon her heart as she opened the door.

She stopped upon the threshold. The very simple and evident fact came like a shock to her.

“No, no,” she assented to herself, letting the idea come slowly. “Of course not; it ain’t my child. William has come back again; but once more, it’s not to me.”

XXI

“SHE’s asking for the baby,” Mrs. Music said, as Charity came out of her room. “Won’t you take it to her?”

Charity returned to the bedside and lifted the little creature from its nest. It was so light in her arms, so small, so feeble, that she could have crushed it from pure love.

“It’s William’s child, and I’ve got to give it away,” she muttered to herself. “It ain’t mine.”

“Who does he look like?” Henny asked, as Charity, bearing her precious burden, came into the kitchen. “Is he like the mother—or the father?”

“I don’t know,” Charity faltered. She was obliged to stop and let Henny look again at the child. Out in the clear light the baby face was puckered and wrinkled, but the features were clearly defined.

“Well, he do look like a little man,” Henny exclaimed, enthusiastically. “He’s got a real face, hasn’t he? and not just a blob o’ putty. Anybody ’ud say he was thirty wi’ that straight little nose and a mouth as looks as if it was goin’ to speak to you. And, mercy me, what eyes! Don’t he look as if he

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knowed a lot more nor he'd tell? He don't feature the mother, that's plain. He's took after his father, I'm sure, just like my little Tom. You knowed his father, I think I've hearn you say?"

"Yes," Charity admitted. "I used to know him well. The baby does look like him."

"Was he pretty—the father?"

"Yes."

"Tall?"

"Yes."

"What colored eyes?"

"This colored—like the baby's."

"Was he a sojer?"

"Yes."

"And what might his name ha' been? I've hearn you say, but I've forgot."

"I think I ought to take the baby in now. Hagar 'll fret if she don't see him. Mrs. Music 'll have her all ready for him."

"That's where the mystery is," Henny reflected, as Charity passed on. "I 'ain't reached the bottom of it yet, but I'll get there."

Charity entered the room in which she herself had been born and both her mother and father had died. At the same moment Mrs. Music, with her usual tact, slipped out. Charity went slowly forward to where Hagar was lying, with face pale, but eyes almost fierce with eagerness.

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“Give me the baby,” she said, imperiously, but in tones so weak as to be little more than a whisper. “Give him to me. Give him to me.”

“I’ve brought him. Lie still, dear. Don’t try to raise yourself. There, there,” Charity went on, as she gently turned down the coverlet—“there, there. I’ll lay him right down beside you, like a dear little bird in its nest.”

“Give him to me. Give him to me,” Hagar kept saying, feverishly. “He ain’t your baby. You’ve got no claim on him. Oh, my son!” she cried out, when once she had him by her side. “Oh, my son! You’re mine—you’re mine—and William’s. You’re William come back to me again. I don’t care now. I don’t care for nothing. Anybody that likes can call theirselves his wife. I’ve got his child. I’m his baby’s mother, and it’s a lawful baby. Oh, my son!”

Then she began to croon, pressing the infant to her breast. Charity stood with clasped hands, trying to stay herself with texts and holy thoughts. “Charity never faileth—never, never faileth,” she repeated to herself, getting from the words what help she could; but she was unable to banish all sense of jealousy, all consciousness of the wrong that had been done her. “It ought to ha’ been my child,” she reflected, bitterly, “and now she won’t let me look at him nor touch him. This is something new I’ve got

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to bear. But I'm punished for not wanting it to be born."

In the midst of her soft crooning Hagar glanced up suddenly. Charity still stood patiently waiting for another glimpse of the child.

"You may look at him," Hagar whispered. "You may just look at him, if you don't touch him."

She withdrew the coverlet slightly, and Charity, stooping, feasted her eyes on the soft, dark, downy head. Hagar covered him quickly again, and Charity was forced to be content.

It was the beginning of a struggle of love and jealousy. Between the two women the conflict that had begun about the father now centred around the child. Their mutual attitude did not change. Hagar remained exacting, capricious, imperious—ruling through the sheer force of her helplessness; Charity continued to be inwardly rebellious and outwardly meek, conquered through her very capacity for sacrifice. Hagar's rights of motherhood gave her new sources of authority. Charity's love for the child kept her in the position of a slave.

The days lengthened; the summer came on; Hagar was strong again; the silent strife continued. When Charity watched her chance to take the baby in her arms, Hagar snatched it from her.

"Oh, let me keep it—just a little while," Charity would plead.

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“It ain’t your baby,” the mother would reply. “He’s mine. He’s mine. No one sha’n’t take him from me.”

Now and then they would bend together over the cradle, pointing out his beauties to each other, or laughing in response to his smile, but this was rare. Hagar’s jealous passion of maternity was something she would not share, while Charity’s growing devotion to the baby made of her a beggar, submitting to be scoffed at and trampled on. She would bear anything for the sake of having her finger held by his fat little hand or seeing him lie, with stout legs kicking, in her lap. It was one bright day in August that she held him so when Hagar entered. For once the mother did not snatch him up. She stood for a minute silently looking on. Then she spoke.

“I’m well now,” she said. “I’m going to take him away. I’m going to take him back where he belongs. He ain’t your child. He’s mine and William’s.”

For Charity it was the end of the end; it was the last sacrifice that could be demanded. She had expected it; she had intended it; she had not meant that Hagar should remain with her after she had grown strong. But now that she was to be despoiled of this final object of her love, this final link to William, her spirit had one more moment of revolt against the exactions of her destiny.

“Very well,” she answered, coldly. “Perhaps it

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will be better if you go. I've heard say that Jacob Eisenhauer 'ull touch next week at Mount Misery. You could walk over there, and he'd take you to Golden Cove Mines. Then you'd be near your own home. Yes, you're well enough to go now. I'd do it, if I was you."

She rose and laid the baby in his cradle. Hagar looked on surprised and frightened. She had never seen this cold, proud air in Charity before.

"You can hold him a little longer, if you like," she offered, timidly.

"No, no," Charity said, with dignity. "I don't want to. I don't want to hold him no more. I'll never ask you to let me take him in my arms again."

She passed out into the garden. Hagar stood still, bewildered, unable to account for this sudden change.

"Is it my fault?" she asked herself. "I 'ain't said nothing out o' the common. It can't be my fault—it can't be."

But nevertheless she did not touch the baby or even look at him. She only stood wondering and afraid, while her lip trembled and two big tears rolled down her gold-colored cheeks.

XXII

WHEN Miss Ellen Schlagenweit saw Alick Eisenhauer in the straggling street of Mount Misery, she walked up to him with a step which was at once long and mincing and addressed him haughtily:

"I'll thank you, Alick Eisenhauer, not to spread it about everywhere that I'm a-going to marry Jonas Boutilier."

The fair-haired, blue-eyed young giant stood still and trembled.

"But I didn't, miss," he blurted out. "I didn't even know he was a-courtin' on you."

"Well, I don't want it said, even if he is," she continued, loftily. "I can't help it if he's been hangin' around Mount Misery for a week and more."

"But I 'ain't seen him, miss, I swear to you," the young man cried, with a distressed air. "I've only just arrove on the *Lottie May*."

"And he's been waitin' for you. Some says you're to be asked to be best man; but, mind you, I don't want no such reports spread."

"You can trust me not to spread 'em, miss," he assured her, and the lady, with a smile, passed on.

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“Whatever can she mean?” the honest boy said to himself. “I declare she frightens me. I’ll go straight back to the ship.”

When he reached the *Lottie May*, drawn up to load with lumber at the one little wharf of Mount Misery, Jonas Boutilier was already there.

“Could you lend me your ear a bit?” Jonas asked, after they had greeted.

“Well, I ain’t in a hurry,” the boy admitted; “but I’ll tell you straight, Mr. Boutilier, I ’ain’t ever been best man afore, and I don’t believe as I’d know how.”

“Lord bless the lad!” Jonas cried. “He’s on to it already. What I mean is that we should be best man to each other. I’d be yours, and you’d be mine, and we’d do it all up at once.”

“I ain’t goin’ to be married,” the boy said, blushing to the temples.

“No; but you was once.”

“That’s all over. She didn’t act right by me. I dunno how you’ve come to hear about it, but—”

“Oh, I’ve lots to tell you, my lad. You come round here, out o’ earshot o’ all these sailors, and we’ll talk it over.”

They seated themselves on some planks in a corner walled in by piles of lumber, where they could speak freely.

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"It's a good while since you was down the Old Shore road way," Jonas began.

"A good while," Alick admitted.

"Not since she was married?"

"No, not since."

"I've heard say as you took it pretty hard."

"Well, I did; but I've got used to it now."

"But not so used as what you're ready to take up wi' some one else?"

"No, I don't want no one else."

"And if you could get her again?"

The boy rose in confusion.

"Look here, Mr. Boutilier, I dunno what you're drivin' at. Don't you try to fool me, because it ain't a thing I'll stand having turned into fun."

"Sit down, Alick," Jonas said, calmly. "I'm speaking serious. You and me's got tied up in the same knot, and we've got to untangle it together. I know all about what took place on the Old Shore road," he continued, when Alick had sat down again. "I know it from first to last, and what I say to you is this, that you oughtn't to be too hard on her."

"But she's married! What difference will it make whether I'm hard or easy on her?"

"Then you 'ain't heard what's happened?"

"I 'ain't heard nothing at all. I've been sailing from New Bedford ever since, and I've just come here by accident on the *Lottie May*."

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“ Well, she ain’t married now. She’s a widder. She’s free.”

Alick leaned forward, his elbows on his knees, and hid his face in his big, red hands.

“ She’s free,” Jonas went on, “ but she’s in trouble. She’s in a big trouble.”

The boy lifted his face to Jonas. In his blue eyes there were tears.

“ What is it? What’s her trouble? Has he left her pore?” His voice was nothing but a trembling whisper.

“ It’s a good deal worse nor that.”

“ Well, what is it, man?” Alick cried out, fiercely. “ Say it, if you mean to. Don’t keep me wriggling as if I was on a harpoon.”

“ It’s trouble as she herself don’t know about yet,” said Jonas, going on in his own calm way. “ I’d say as she was like a ship sailing with a good breeze and fine weather and not knowin’ that a hurricane was a breedin’ right ahead. She’s goin’ to have need o’ some one to stand by her—”

“ Well, I’m here. Married or not married, she’ll not lack a man beside her when I’m ashore.” The color came again to his face, and his blue eyes flashed.

“ That’s well spoken, my lad. You and me ’ll understand each other, never fear.”

Then Jonas told the story of Hagar’s marriage, her husband’s death, and the baby’s birth. He sup-

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pressed the fact that Soldier Penn was also William Pennland, but he laid stress on the manner in which Michael Levanti met his death.

“And what I’m comin’ to is this,” he said. “There’s folks as is bad enough to think that Michael Levanti was shot by his own daughter.”

“God!” the young man cried, starting up again. “Who says so? Tell me their names.”

“There’s lots on ’em,” Jonas answered, tranquilly. “It began wi’ a relation o’ hers down there—a chap named Demetr’us Levanti, as wicked a-lookin’ feller as ever I see. He says he saw Michael fall dead, and the girl and William Penn—they wasn’t married then—a-sneakin’ through the woods wi’ the gun a-smokin’ in their hand.”

“And I says it’s a damned lie!” the young giant roared. “I know Demetr’us Levanti, and the next time I see him I’ll break his neck. If any one shot Michael Levanti, ’twas him.”

“Yes,” Jonas argued, “you and me may think that, but other folks doesn’t. That’s where the trouble lays.”

“Well, other folks is damned fools, then.”

“That’s true enough,” Jonas agreed, willingly. “I’ve always said as human beings was a good deal like poultry—the women geese and the men owls. But that don’t stop ’em from makin’ a lot o’ trouble for the like o’ you and me. All this past winter

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they've been a-whisperin' and a-hintin' and a-con-fabulatin' up and down shore, trying to persuade themselves that she must ha' done it. There ain't none of 'em believes it, if the truth was known, but it kind o' excites 'em like to think as they've got some one in their midst as has done a awful crime. And, now, what do you think?"

"I dunno."

"Isr'el Schlagenweit steps up to me yesterday when I was in Peggy's Cove, and asks me if I wouldn't be one of a gang to take her over to Harrietsfield and swear to her before the justice o' the peace."

"And what did you say?"

"That I ain't goin' to repeat. But if Isr'el is gone where I told him to go he's got gang enough already. The fact is, Alick, life is too quiet along this shore. Most folks ain't like you and me, as travels about and sees the world. What they're trying to do is to get up something to talk about, and so they've pitched on this pore girl. But I've got a plan as 'ull stop 'em, if you'll jine in wi' me."

"I'll jine wi' anything as 'ull save her, Mr. Boutilier."

"Then you and me 'ull go over to Fisher's Grant to-morrow and offer marriage to 'em both."

The boy looked stupefied with surprise.

"That's the way," Jonas assured him. "We'll marry 'em right out o' hand. I'll take Mrs. Penn-

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land, and you'll take the Widder Penn. Then we'll see who'll dare to say a word against 'em. Your brother Jacob is to touch here the day after to-morrow and sail the same night. You and her 'ull go aboard o' him, and sail right off to the Old Shore road, or wherever you likes to go. It's as plain as a pikestaff. You and me has only got to go up to Mrs. Pennland's cottage and the thing is done."

"But if they won't have us?"

"I'll answer for that. I never knowed the woman yet as 'ud hold out beyond a p'int. I've done a good deal o' offering marriage in my time, and I'll speak for us both. I've got the trick of it. I've never yet put it fair and square to Mrs. Pennland or I expect I'd ha' had her before now. But she's one o' them delikit critturs as you've got to work up to by degrees. I've done the degrees, and now I think she's ready to hear the whole story wi'out going off in a faint."

"But Hagar mightn't—"

"Hagar *will*, my boy. I'll fetch her to it. You and me ain't a team such as 'ull drive up every day. Hagar knows the p'int of a man as well as another, and she'll not have took the second look at you before she's yours."

"Then it ain't true as you're goin' to marry Miss Ellen Schlagenweit?" Alick asked, when they had talked further of the plan Jonas had proposed.

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“Ellen Schlagenweit has her p'int,” Jonas admitted, after a slight hesitation. “No man can't say what he may have to come to. If a thing is meant, it's meant. I've come to believe that. But I ain't going to marry her, not if I can get Mrs. Pennland.”

“And you think you can?”

“I'm sure I can.”

“Then, here goes! I'll try wi' you, Mr. Boutilier.”
And the man and the boy clasped hands.

XXIII

It was one of those mornings in early August when it seemed as if everything that could bloom was blooming; as if everything that could sing was singing; as if everything that had perfume was throwing it on the air. Charity's garden, viewed from out at sea, was like a bit of rainbow fallen on the land. There was violet of pansy, light blue of larkspur, dark blue of monkshood, yellow of lupine, orange of nasturtium, and red of roses — all shading into one another through every gradation of tone.

"Looks pretty, don't it?" Jonas said to Alick as they rowed round Needle Point from the direction of Mount Misery. "I don't know a spot where a man 'ud be better provided for nor just there. I can't help the feelin' that I'm in luck. We're both in luck if it comes to that; for you won't often see a takesomer female than the Widder Penn. She'll be all the better for bein' a widder, too, my boy. Her sperrit 'ull be a bit broke for you, and you'll be saved time and trouble. This 'ull make my third, and it's been a widder every time."

"Ellen Schlagenweit ain't a widder," said Alick,

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dipping his oar with nervous but unnecessary energy. "Last night you was partly thinkin' o' her."

"But only as a kind o' come-in-second. If she ain't a widder, she's pretty nigh as good; and as for talk, you'll not find her grammar anywhere outside of a college. She's a woman as a man might be proud on—that is, if he couldn't get Mrs. Pennland."

"I hope we'll find 'em in," said Alick, looking anxiously over his shoulder at the spot of blossom on the hill. "I'd like to get it done with. I'm oneasy."

"If they ain't in, they won't be far. You'll just set in the garding, and I'll go round and herd 'em up like. But I expecks they'll be there. Women has a kind o' scent for this sort o' thing. They'll sniff up a offer o' marriage days ahead; and by the time it's got to the end o' your tongue you'll find 'em in your way.

"There! What did I tell you?" Jonas said, in corroboration of the last remark, when, a quarter of an hour later, they climbed the hill and saw Charity and Hagar in the garden. The two women sat with their backs to the road, and thus did not see the approach of their visitors. "Looks as if they was waitin' for us," Jonas pursued, "and I shouldn't wonder if they was. There's your Hagar, a-holding of her baby. It's a fine boy, and 'ull remind you o' your old shipmate as is took away. What's Mrs. Pennland doing? Ah! shellin' peas. That 'll be for

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dinner. Come on, lad, we've got good news for 'em, so we needn't be afraid to step out."

"Just wait a bit," said Alick. "I'd like to get my breath. I'm awful oneasy, Mr. Boutilier, and that's a fact. I 'ain't had much practice in this kind o' business. There's Reuben Jolimœurs up among the blueberry bushes. What's he a-spyin' at? And there's old Uncle Amos Schlagenweit a-hobblin' about. What are they up to?"

"Seem to be havin' a blueberry frolic. There's Isr'el Schlagenweit and Hen Jolimœurs and Sandy Boutilier and Sam. Looks as if they'd took a day off to pick blueberries. Queer, ain't it?"

"They'll take a day home if I hear any more talk o' their gangs," the blue-eyed giant threatened; "that is," he added, "all as I can get my hands on. I say as we'd better be goin' on, Mr. Boutilier. When there's that kind of a blueberry frolic on the uplands our place is over there." He nodded in the direction of the women.

"I'm glad to see you've got your breath, lad. You'll not be so oneasy now that there's a reason for doing it straight off."

"The quicker the better," said the boy, and they went on again.

"Sh! Sh!" Jonas whispered, as they came to the garden gate. "They ain't looking this way. They don't see us. We'll just creep along this path, under

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the shadder o' the big blue flowers; then we'll take 'em sudden by comin' out from behind that clump o' hollyhocks. We'll give 'em a shock like; then they'll be easier dealt with. You must always begin wi' a shock, to give a offer o' marriage a fair start."

They did as Jonas suggested, and moved along softly behind a row of larkspurs. Bees were bumbling from flower to flower, and once a humming-bird flew across the path like a bit of living emerald. As they came to the hollyhocks Jonas pushed Alick forward. The two women sat without speaking, Charity at work, Hagar holding her sleeping child.

"What's that?" Hagar exclaimed, suddenly.

"It's me, Hagar," said Alick Eisenhauer, coming up in front of her.

She gave a little scream, and partially rose from her seat, clasping the child tightly.

"What have you come for?" she cried, dropping back into her seat again. "Go away! Go away! Oh, Charity, help me!"

"Don't send him away, missy," Jonas said, stepping up in his turn. "Him and me has come to have a word wi' you and Mrs. Pennland."

"I'm glad to see you, Jonas," Charity said, rising and holding out her hand. "And I'm glad to see you, too, Mr. Eisenhauer. I 'ain't seen you since you was a little boy, though your father and mine was close friends. 'Twas Cap'n Eisenhauer as give my

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father the first root he ever planted in the garden. There 'tis now—that big larkspur as looks as if it was covered with a swarm o' blue butterflies. I'm partic'lar fond of it. And how is your health, Jonas?" she added, turning to her old friend.

"It 'll be better, ma'am, when I've said what I've come to say."

"Then hadn't we best go in, where we can all sit down?"

"No, ma'am; you sit down. Alick and me 'ull stand. Sit down, ma'am; please sit down."

Charity obeyed, wondering, taking a seat beside Hagar, against a background of many-colored sweet-peas.

"Me and Alick has come to say," Jonas began, more nervously than he had intended—"we've come to say as we'll marry you, ma'am, out o' hand, if so be as you're willing; as I suppose and hope and pray you be, ma'am, living so long alone and wi'out company, and you still young for your years and take-some, and money laid by, and me with money laid by, too—more nor anybody 'ud think, ma'am—and this nice garding, and no children nor inconveniences of any kind. And so we've made up our mind to put it plain to you, ma'am, and not leave it in doubt any longer as to what our feelings is, and not let you think as we was playin' fast and loose, and didn't mean it, as I've known men to do; but it ain't our

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way, ma'am, and we're here to testify to it, and I hope as you'll take it to 'cart."

Jonas paused. He and Alick stood twisting their hats around in their hands and waited for a reply. Charity and Hagar sat motionless, gazing up at the two men as if they had lost the power of speech.

"I forgot to say, ma'am," Jonas began again, "as we're ready to marry the Widder Penn, too—he bearing no grudge for her not marrying him the last time she was married, but willing to let bygones be bygones."

"Yes, I am, Hagar," the young man spoke up, tremulously. "I'll never lay it up agin you as you didn't act right by me; and I'd never cast it up to you, not even if I was in liquor. I'll take the child, and I'll do well by you both; for I'm mortal fond o' you, Hagar, and I can't help sayin' so right out before anybody."

Again there was a pause. Hagar bent her face over the baby, but Charity continued to gaze up in astounded silence. The constraint was painful. The giant bit his lip and pawed on the ground like an impatient horse. Jonas's face grew wistful and his lip quivered.

"I 'ain't said it well, ma'am," he burst out, quaveringly. "I meant to do it a good deal better, but I've lost the trick."

"Oh no, you haven't, my dear friend," Charity ex-

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claimed, quickly. "You haven't lost it. You've said it very well. Hagar and me is more touched than we can tell you, but—"

"But I haven't told you all our good p'int's, ma'am," Jonas insisted. "Don't say no till you've taken a good think over the kind o' men we be, and how we ain't likely to be picked up every day, and how we'd never do nothing to give you trouble, nor make you wish your cake was dough. I 'ain't said all that, as I meant to."

"I know it, Jonas. I know it. Hagar knows it, too. She'll have to speak for herself. She'll tell you, Alick, what her answer is; but, dear friend Jonas, I'm a woman as has suffered too much to—"

"Why, here's people," Jonas cried, in a tone of exasperation. "Dang it all, why can't they wait? Can't they be sent away?"

As he spoke old Amos Schlagenweit, dressed in the shiny black broadcloth that he wore only at frolics and funerals, stumped forward along one of the paths. Behind him Israel Schlagenweit, also in his best, marched with head uplifted and a heroic expression as though he meant to do his duty or die. Outside the gate a little knot of men hung about foolishly, apparently not knowing whether to come in or to go away. One by one they plucked up courage, and, led by Hen Jolimœurs and Long Tom, they followed Amos and Israel in.

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“Why, Uncle Amos!” Charity cried, rising. “It’s a treat to see you.”

She was flushed with the emotions raised by what Jonas had just said, but she went forward and held out her hand.

“I come in the name o’ the law,” Amos said, majestically, waving aside the proffered courtesy.

“And we’re all here to take a oath to it,” Israel added, in the same tone.

“Mercy on us!” Charity cried; “whatever can it be?”

“Mrs. Pennland,” Israel pursued, “there’s goings on here as hadn’t ought to be.”

“Oh, you’re mistook, Isr’el!” Charity cried, blushing more deeply.

“We ain’t mistook, ma’am,” Amos replied. “And here’s Long Tom Jolimœurs, as was a witness of everything from the first.”

“We’re a gang—” Hen Jolimœurs began to creak.

“The devil you are!” shouted the giant, his blue eyes flashing like steel. As he spoke he seized the light-limbed Hen and flung him over the hedge of sweet-peas into the rough vegetation beyond the garden pale.

“Come, come, young man,” Amos exclaimed, stepping back, “that’s resistin’ the law, and a matter o’ hangin’.”

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"You'll not have a neck to hang by," Alick retorted, "if I hear any more about gangs."

"We don't mean nothin' but justice, Mrs. Pennland," Amos called from a safe distance. "We've come here for your good. You don't know as you've been a harborin' of a awful evil-doer; but the law 'ull have to take it's course. Here's Long Tom, as was a witness—"

"I ain't the only one," Long Tom objected, in dislike of assuming the entire onus of proof. "You're all witnesses."

"Yes," Israel assented. "We're all witnesses. We've heard things as 'ud make your blood run cold and b'ile, and we're ready to swear to what we've heard."

Charity looked in mystification from one to another. Hagar sat still, with face bent over the sleeping baby. Alick Eisenhauer, flashing defiance from his eyes, took his stand beside her. Jonas grew as white as it was in his power to become. The men who had lingered in the background pressed forward. Reuben Jolimœurs' big red beard showed itself over the shoulders of Sam and Sandy Boutilier. Black David sheltered himself behind Reuben; and, behind David, Hen Jolimœurs, very white and slightly damaged from his flight over the wall, crept up to see, if not to be seen again. Between them there were vistas bright with phlox and verbena, while the air

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was sweet with the scent of heliotrope and mignonette.

“What is it? What is it?” Charity questioned, looking eagerly from one to another.

“Say right out what it is, Amos,” Reuben called from the recesses of his big beard. “What’s the use o’ hangin’ back?”

“Say it yourself,” Amos retorted. “You’re as much for the law as me.”

“It’s Long Tom Jolimœurs as ought to say it,” Sam Boutilier declared, scornfully. “He was the first as brought the news—if he didn’t make the story up. Anyhow, he’s got us all agog; and what we want to know is, is it true? If it ain’t true, we won’t molest no one, and the law ’ull be dropped.”

“Let me question her,” Sandy urged, edging his way forward. “I’ll know by her answers whether it’s true or not!”

“No, no, Sandy,” Israel objected. “That ain’t law. She can’t be questioned till there’s been a oath took. Let me speak. I’ll say it. I’ve always had a fancy for the law, and I’ve studied it partic’lar.”

“Well, say it, then,” two or three voices cried at once, while the company formed a little circle in which Israel and Hagar were the central figures. The woman did not raise her head. The man lifted his arm and pointed at her.

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"I accuse—this young female—" he said, slowly and solemnly, "of—having caused—another person's—death."

"You infernal liar!" the young giant began, but Hagar stopped him.

"Keep quiet, Alick," she said, for the first time looking up. "I did do it."

There was a general movement of surprise. Up to that moment none of the men had believed in "the gang's" mission. They were primitive souls, playing in earnest, like so many children, and only half aware of the terribleness of their make-believe.

"I did do it," she repeated, looking up again.

"Tut, tut, missy. You're crazy," Jonas protested.

"You don't know what you're saying, Hagar, dear!" Charity cried. "You must excuse her," she added, turning to the group of men. "She ain't well. She hasn't been well this long spell."

Alick Eisenhauer stood with folded arms as if petrified. He gazed away far above every one's head, to the line where the uplands met the sky.

"I did do it," Hagar said the third time. "I did it, and I'm goin' to tell about it. I don't care what they do to me; I'm goin' to tell. I want to get it off my mind. It's true, I'm crazy, but it's this as makes me so. I ain't goin' to hide it any longer. It's turn-

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ing me into a bad woman. It's making me wicked and cruel and onthankful to the best friend any one ever had. I'm goin' to tell."

"Then I'm damned if I'm goin' to listen," Sam Boutilier called out. "Come away, men. We've got no business here."

"No, stay!" Hagar cried. "Stay; I want you to stay. You can do what you like afterwards, but I've got to tell you. If I don't tell, I'll die. I'd rather die."

She scarcely raised her voice, and did not change her tone from one of dead monotony. The slight movement to go away, that followed Sam Boutilier's words, was stopped. It was not in nature to withdraw from the scene at so thrilling a point.

Hagar held the babe more tightly to her breast and spoke again.

"It was this way," she began, finding words with difficulty. "When my father was shot, Soldier Penn was at our house sick. I tended him, and I got fond o' him. We got fond o' each other. Then we was married."

Her breath came hardly, though she gave no other outward sign of emotion.

"Don't tell any more, dear," Charity begged, kneeling down beside her and throwing her arms about her waist.

"No, miss," Sam said, with a quaver of entreaty

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in his voice. "If I was you, I'd drop it. We don't want to hear it."

"Yes, we do," old Amos whispered, peevishly. "It's very interestin'. You keep quiet, Sam."

"We was married," Hagar panted, "and we was happy. I was fond o' him and he o' me. It wasn't common fondness—mine wasn't. I can't explain any more to you, but you must just guess. It was as if I'd never lived before he'd come and couldn't live if he was to go away."

Alick Eisenhauer stood like a bronze figure, but his eyes glittered and his mouth twitched.

"Then one day," Hagar went on, slowly, "he said he'd go away. He didn't love me any longer. He said he'd loved lots o' women as much as he'd loved me. And then he said—he said—he said—that he had a wife—a wife that wasn't me—that I was not his wife."

Charity grew white. The men, half clinging to one another, drew nearer, their eyes fixed on Hagar.

"I didn't believe it at first—I couldn't believe it—I couldn't think as the man I'd ha' died for could ha' treated me like that. But he did. He said his other wife was drawing him—that he must go back to her. He said he could smell death, and that he must make his peace wi' her before he died. He said she was everything to him, and I was nothing any more."

Slowly Charity withdrew her arms from about

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Hagar's waist and crouched on the grass beside her.

"Then he went," Hagar panted on. "He left me. He'd heard sudden how Jacob Eisenhauer was to touch at Golden Cove Mines, and he said he'd go along o' him. But there was no time to arrange it; and so he asked me, first to row him over to Hungry Island, and then tramp round to Golden Cove and get some one to telegraph a message to the Mines. It was to say as how Soldier Penn was on the island and to ask Jacob to pick him up. I said I'd do it. I rowed him out to the island and left him there—but—but—I never went to Golden Cove. I left him there. I couldn't have him go back to the other woman—"

Charity uttered a cry as if she had been struck, and covered her face with her hands.

"I left him on the island," Hagar went on, doggedly. "I watched the *Leviathan* go by, but Jacob never sent to take him off. I left him there."

"And how long would it be, missy, that you left him there?" Amos inquired, in a tone of deep interest; "not overnight, I hope."

"I left him there a week."

"Oh, Lord ha' mercy on us!" the old man cried, throwing up his arms. "But that's awful conduct!"

"I didn't mean to leave him there so long," she continued, in the same monotonous tone. "The first day I thought I'd go for him the second, and the

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second I put it off till the third, and the third day I was afraid to go. I didn't mean it all at once. It just came gradual. But I left him there."

"And didn't he have no victuals?" Amos inquired again.

"Only enough for a day," she answered.

"Oh, my, my! But it was enough to kill a man!" he cried.

"It did kill him," she said, quietly.

"Dead?" he gasped, in horror.

"Not at first, but he died from it. I used to sit on the shore and watch the island day and night. I'd think sometimes as I'd go out for him, but I knew that if I brought him back he'd go off to the other woman; so what 'ud ha' been the use? I thought he'd better die. Then one day I found out—as how—this—little—baby—was to be born." Her breath caught with a kind of sob, but she forced herself to go on again. "Then I couldn't leave him there no more. He was the child's father, and I had to bring him back. It was the day after the August storm last year. It was a partic'lar bad storm, but I rowed out to the island all the same. And there he was on the shore."

"Dead?" whispered Amos again.

"No, not dead. He was lying on the shore with his head down among the stones and his feet up on the grass, but he was living; he could talk. He called me

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all the time by his first wife's name. I dragged him on the boat and rowed him home. Then I nursed him as well as I could, but he died. I killed him. He wouldn't ha' died if I'd let him go back to the other woman. But I wouldn't. I killed him. I couldn't help it. I suffered awful. I've always suffered. Everything has been against me from the first. But that was the worst of all. Now!" she cried out aloud, standing up suddenly and startling the men back—"now you can do as you like wi' me. I don't want to live except for the baby's sake. But if I'm took, the Lord 'ull give him a better mother nor me. Now!"

Still with the baby in her arms, she held her small head proudly while her eyes blazed.

The men shrank back and whispered together. Charity remained seated on the grass, her face hidden in her hands. Alick Eisenhower stood motionless, his features drawn, but his gaze fixed far away. Jonas wriggled restlessly, lamenting this interruption to his wooing.

Presently the men drew near again, Amos and Israel in the van. Hagar confronted them without flinching.

"It seems to us," Israel began, "as we've got a bigger job on hand than we'd intended. Now, we didn't come here, miss, to talk about this at all. What brought us was only that folks says you shot your father. Now, did you or didn't you?"

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"No; I never heard before that I was accused of it. It's foolish. Everybody knows I didn't."

"Then that settles that p'int," said Israel—"or at least it would in a court o' law. But as for this new business you've let us into, we don't see but what we'll be obliged to take you over to Harrietsfield and swear to you before the justice o' the peace."

"Very well; I'll go."

"Mind you, miss, it ain't our own desire; but law's law, and it's for heads o' families like us to see it ain't broke, when it ain't us as breaks it."

"I'll go," Hagar said again. "I'll feed the baby, then I'll go."

Charity rose slowly to her feet and stood beside Hagar. She was very white, and one would have said her face had grown older.

"Listen to me, men," she said, quietly, finding words more readily than ever before. "I've got something to tell you as well as she—something I've kept back from you. She haven't told you all the truth, and I haven't, neither. The man who married her was my husband, William Pennland."

"Dear! dear!" Amos murmured, sympathetically; "and you a-waitin' for him here! That wasn't right o' him. He ought to ha' acted better."

"You all know the story o' my life," Charity continued. "You know how I loved my husband—how faithful I was to him—how I believed he'd come back

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to me just as if it was from the dead. I never made no secret of it. I lived in the thought o' his return."

"That's so, ma'am," Amos agreed; "and very foolish we thought you was, when you could ha' had the pick o' pretty near any of us as wasn't already took."

"Then one day last summer—the very day after the August storm—just as I watched Jacob Eisenhauer's *Leviathan* sail out, and wondered whether William could ha' been aboard—that very day my friend, Jonas Boutilier here, came and told me he had seen my husband and that he was married again."

"I did," Jonas corroborated, "and if any one says different it 'ull be a lie."

"He told me he had took the name o' William Penn, and that he had married Hagar Levanti. I needn't tell you the despair I was in. It 'ud ha' been easier for me if I could ha' died. Some o' you may mind how I went away sudden, and there was a good deal o' talk about where I'd gone. Well, I went to him. I reached him an hour or two before he died. I was with him at the last. But I didn't know, then, what was the matter with him. He was very weak and starved-looking; but it's always been a mystery to me what his trouble was. Now she's told us, and I know. He was coming back to me when she—stopped him. He would ha' come. He must ha' been sorry for what he'd done wrong. He must ha' begun

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to repent of his sins, and perhaps God 'll find a way to have mercy on him. But he thought o' me. My name was the last on his lips. That 'll always be a comfort to me. He would ha' come home if she hadn't left him on the island."

"That 'll have to be swore to before the justice o' the peace," Israel declared. "It 'll tell black agin her."

"But, dear friends," Charity hastened to add, her color returning and her hands spread apart, "there's other things for us to think of besides the wrong that's been done ourselves. We've got to consider the wrong that's been done to others, and what they've had to suffer. Hagar has told you what she did, but she hasn't told you all that drove her to it. She couldn't make you understand it if she did tell you; but I understand it without her telling. I'm a woman, and you're men; and no man can know what it means to a woman to be betrayed by him she's loved and trusted and given her whole self up to. That's a madness and despair that ain't in any o' you to fancy. But I've been through it. I know what it is. She's suffered what I've suffered—only she's suffered worse, she's suffered keener, she's suffered more shameful and more cruel. What I had to bear came gradual, through years, and it's been softened by the love and kindness you've give me ever since I was a little girl. She was all alone; she had no one; she had no neigh-

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bors, no friends, no kin. And yet she was shook off—she was left deserted and dishonored—and no one in the whole world to stand by her or say a word o' comfort. I don't say nothing against my husband. He's my husband, and I love him still, and I'll never love no man but him. Right up to the last I tried to keep his name clear o' everything evil. He was coming back to me; he was doing what he thought was right; but, then, everything was wrong. He'd done so much wrong that he couldn't do right any more. He'd got entangled in his own net, and whatever step he took he fell. He's in God's hands now, and I leave him to God's mercy. But she's in our hands, men, and has no mercy but ours to look to. You think it awful for her to've done what she did. I think it awful, too, but I can enter into all the feelings from which she did it. You'd drag her before the law, but I that have suffered more than any one because o' her and her sin—I forgive her. I forgive her true. I forgive her before God. I forgive her without keeping anything back or nursing malice within me."

She moved close to Hagar's side and threw her arm across her shoulder. The baby stirred in its sleep, but did not wake.

"Look at us, men!" Charity cried. "We're two women as has been wife to one man. We've both been betrayed—we've both suffered. Are you going

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to make us suffer more? Haven't we had enough? Him that strikes at her 'ull strike first at me."

"And at me," said Alick Eisenhauer, standing close to Hagar.

"And at me," Jonas echoed, ranging himself beside Charity.

There was a brief pause. Among the men there seemed confusion and hesitation. Amos, as spokesman, recovered himself first.

"I vote the law 'ull be dropped," he said.

"And me, too," Reuben Jolimœurs assented.

"I ain't agin it," Sandy affirmed, while Black David and Hen Jolimœurs declared themselves of his opinion.

"I think," Israel avowed, sententiously, "as she ought to be bound over to keep the peace, like the woman at Tracadie as tried to stab her husband wi' the butter-knife. That 'ud be law. Then she could be pardoned."

"And I say," came from Sam Boutilier, "as it's all danged nonsense and has been so from the first. The best thing we can do is to get off home, and never let no one know where we've been or that we've made such confounded fools of ourselves. I'd like every one here to understand that him as keeps mum-mest on this day's work before his wife and family, and when he's aboard, and when he's anywhere, is him as 'ull best show hissself a man. As for me, I've said

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my last word on the whole subject, and death 'ull be my doom before I ever open my lips on it again."

"That's well spoken, Sam," Reuben called out, "and I'll jine with you. Death 'ull be my doom before ever I speak of it to livin' crittur, so help me, God!"

"If there's oaths to be took, I'll take one, too," said Israel. "The minute there's law, I'll unite wi' any one. I swear before heaven and earth; and kissin' the book, that I'll never say nothin' agin nobody here, male or female, so help me, God!"

The formula once accepted was repeated by all, Amos alone making the reservation that he did not see why they should not continue to talk the matter over among themselves so long as "nothin' was said to the women."

"And now, Mrs. Pennland," said Sam, stepping forward, "I'll shake hands wi' you and wish you well."

"Thank you, Sam," said Charity, "you're a good friend, and Hagar and me 'ull never forget you."

"And I'll shake hands wi' you, too, Mrs. Penn," he continued, "and wish you the same."

But Hagar stepped back, looking at him in a dazed way, and burst into uncontrollable laughter.

XXIV

LATE that afternoon Jonas Boutilier and Alick Eisenhower trudged wearily down the hill up which they had come on the wings of hope in the morning. They said nothing till they reached the "skids," where Alick's boat was drawn up.

"Then you'll be goin' back to the *Lottie May*?" Jonas asked, when the moment had come to part.

"Yes," the boy grunted, not trusting himself to speak.

"I'm sorry, lad, to've brought you on this wild-goose chase. But you see how 'tis. 'Twouldn't be nat'rel if two women as has been through all they've been through was to take up wi' some one else. 'Tain't like bein' left a widder in a reg'lar way. I know you'd have took her, anyhow, even after what she said. But depend upon it, Alick, she's in the right on it. As she says herself, she ain't in a state to make a wife for no man."

"She'd ha' been good enough for me. I'd ha' been proud to take care o' her and make her happy."

"She ain't to be made happy, lad, and you'd ha' found that out if she'd ha' took you. Her happiness

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is all over, pore soul. All anybody could give her now 'ud be a sort o' soothin' and peace."

"I'd ha' done that for her, then."

"She couldn't take it from you, lad. It 'ud have to be some other kind o' hand than yourn as 'ud lay it on. Women as have been through things is dreadful partic'lar as to who'll soothe 'em and who'll not, and the best intentions is often wasted on 'em. But you're young, Alick. You'll find some one else as you'll take a fancy to, and as 'll make up to you for this. It's different wi' me. All I'll get now 'ull be second best, even if it ain't third."

So they parted, each heart-sore.

When the two men had received their answers and left the cottage, Hagar and Charity looked each other in the eyes.

"I ought to thank you," Hagar stammered. "You've been good to me. I never thought no one could be so good. And I've been so awful to you. I've broke your heart. I've been your curse. And yet you've forgiven me. I can't say nothing about it. I don't know how. But I'll not stay to be a living pain to you. I'll go away, and you'll try to forget me. No, you can't do that; but I'll go, anyhow, so as you sha'n't have to see me."

"Jacob Eisenhauer sails from Mount Misery at high tide to-morrow evening," Charity said, not coldly, but in a voice from which all feeling seemed to

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have fled. "If you was to walk round there you could get passage with him, I'm sure. He'd drop you at Golden Cove."

"Very well. I'll do that. I'll start early."

Since her hysterical outbreak of the morning she had remained calm. She had even taken on again the impassive Indian air—the mask beneath which she concealed her strongest emotions.

"That 'll be best," Charity assented, and each woman shut herself up in her own room.

Charity sat down at her window and looked out over the garden, the uplands, the rows of headlands, and the sea. Her very nerves were tingling with something between joy and pain.

"He was coming back to me. He was coming back to me," she repeated to herself. "He'd ha' been here on the *Leviathan* the day after the August storm. He'd ha' been here now. We'd ha' begun our life all over again, and I'd ha' made him happy. He'd ha' been here whistling about the garden, and coming in to supper, and playing wi' the baby—"

The swift color rose to her cheeks. It spread up to her temples and down to her neck.

"The baby might ha' been mine. I'd ha' had everything instead o' nothing. I'd ha' been a happy woman instead o'—what I am."

So her thoughts worked back to Hagar.

"And she's suffered worse than me. She's got to

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suffer worse still. I've learned how to bend to my burden, but her burden ain't all laid on her yet. Not a year 'ull go by but 'll make it heavier. Not a day 'ull dawn but she'll know more and more the awful thing she's done. The very growing of the baby 'ull remind her that his father might ha' been alive if it hadn't been for her. Pore, helpless soul! It ain't for me to say a word or show a sign as 'ull make her remorse keener. I pity her. I've said that I forgive her, and I do. She didn't act right by William, but no more did he act right by her. It's all so mixed and tangled. There's nothing to do as I can see but bear each other's burden and not to make bad worse. To-morrow she'll be gone, and the baby 'ull be gone, and me and my sorrow 'ull be alone. Well, I'm used to it, but not so used as before they came. They've been company to me, like; and somehow, in spite o' everything, they've worked their way into the place in my heart where up to now there's been only William. But they've got to go. After what she told out public to-day, it 'ud never do for her and me to meet again. She'll never own up as I'm his wife; she'll never even give me leave to love the child. My duty by her is done. I can't do no more. I've come to the end. Now, it's nothing but right as I should send 'em away. I'll send 'em. To-morrow they'll go. That's all that's possible."

But as she rose to go out to prepare the supper, the

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voice she had more than once heard speak, as it were outside herself, spoke again:

“Charity never faileth.”

She paused for a second and reasoned.

“No, it don’t fail,” she said, silently, “but there’s a point beyond which it ain’t able to go.”

The voice made no response, and she passed out to her task.

Supper was eaten as on other evenings, only the effort made by each not to refer to the scene of the morning brought about some constraint. Hagar retired early.

“I’ve got the baby to wash and my bundle to make up,” she said, to excuse herself.

“I’ll put you up some food,” said Charity. “And you’ll want a bottle o’ milk for the child.”

In the morning they were ready. Charity had not slept. She had not even gone to bed. She had kept vigil as on that other August night now nearly a year ago. She had sat through the darkness and waited for the dawn. She had no need of rest; her spirit was too active and too wide-awake. Hagar was going; the child was going; there was no help for it. The volume of her life in which William had the central part was written down to the last word. Now it must be closed.

“There’s no help for it. There’s no help for it,” Charity said over and over to herself, as the

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chill dawn broke upon a waste of sullen, moaning waters.

But the sun rose, the flowers unclosed, the birds sang, the sea-gulls swooped, the fishing-boats sailed out, and the splendid activity of the summer's day began again. Hagar came from her room, her bonnet on, her bundle ready, and the baby dressed. The packet of food and the bottle of milk were on the table.

"It's like the day that William went," Hagar thought; "only this time it's me. Baby and me 'll go back and live where William's ghost 'ull walk over from Hungry Island on every wave as rolls ashore. Every whitecap 'ull be his footsteps, every wail o' the wind 'ull be his voice. It 'll not be Brother Louis' spirit as I shall see climbing up Cape Freels; it 'ull be William's. Well, since God's got to punish me, it might as well be one way as t'other. Baby and me 'll only have to bear it."

So she sat down impassively, phlegmatically, and ate. Charity ate with her. The few words that passed concerned the road to be taken to reach Mount Misery. Breakfast ended, Hagar rose.

"I'd better be going now," she said, in a business-like tone.

As she spoke she took the baby in her arms, picked up her bundle, and seized, somehow, the packet of food and the bottle of milk. In an in-

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stant she was at the door. On the threshold she turned brusquely.

“ Good-bye,” she flung back, and was gone.

Charity had not moved from the table. The quick departure had taken her by surprise. Before she had time to rise and run to the door Hagar was outside the garden gate.

She took the path that Charity had indicated, through the blueberry and huckleberry shrubs. It zigzagged across the uplands until it joined the road leading round the head of the cove to Mount Misery. Charity’s impulse was to call out to her, to bid her wait, to make the leave-taking more affectionate. But she checked herself.

“ No, no,” she said. “ It’s better for her to go like that. She killed William.”

Hagar walked rapidly, with long, easy, Indian-like stride. There was no grace in her movements, as there was no coquetry in her attire. She carried her burdens with the lightness inherited from a strain of camp-moving ancestors. She trudged sturdily, mounting gradually, and never once looked behind. Charity watched her as she tramped now east, now west, but always rising, as the path turned and doubled on itself.

“ She’ll look back when she gets to the top and before she rounds the shoulder of the hill. Then I’ll wave my hand,” thought Charity.

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But Hagar reached the shoulder of the hill and went round it with the same dogged, determined stride. She and the baby had gone.

“ Still she’ll come back and look,” Charity hoped, and so watched on. But she did not come back again.

Charity turned to enter the cottage, and once more she seemed to hear a voice, outside herself, that said :

“ Charity never faileth.”

XXV

WHEN Charity re-entered the house the sense of its emptiness came on her as a shock. The abruptness of Hagar's departure was like an unexpected vanishing. Charity found it impossible to realize that she had gone. On the breakfast-table there was the milk she had only tasted and the bread she had broken but not eaten. A few minutes ago she had been there, and now she had gone forever. A few minutes ago the baby had been cooing and crowing and stretching out dimpled hands; now he, too, had gone, and Charity should never see him any more. William had gone; Hagar had gone; the child had gone.

"Everything's gone," she said, aloud, as she stood and looked about her empty home.

She crossed to Hagar's room and opened the door. There was the bed she had slept in; there was the water the baby had been washed in; there was the pretty disorder that belongs to the dressing and undressing of a child. And yet they were both gone. When the morning's household work should be done there would be no other trace of their passage than that in Charity's heart.

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She closed the door again and came out into the kitchen. She felt dazed, bewildered, cut away from her anchorage. She gazed at the table helplessly; she had no impulse to do her usual work. It seemed impossible to begin again to wash and dust and scour, as if it were an ordinary day. She took a cup in her hand, but put it down again. There was no such thing as need for her any more, no such thing as duty. No one would turn to her, no one would have a claim on her. There would be no weakness for her to shield, no wilfulness to call for her forbearance. Nothing would matter, except that she herself should be clothed and fed and have sleep and shelter. She hurried to the door again. Perhaps, after all, Hagar had relented and was coming back. But no; the uplands were sparkling in dewy freshness, and birds were darting from shrub to shrub; but Hagar was not there.

“Oh, Hagar, come back!” rose like a cry in Charity’s heart, while she twisted her hands together as if in desperate supplication.

She went out into the open air and slipped down on the bench beside the door. The glory of the morning, the sparkle of the sea, the singing of the birds, and the beauty of the flowers at her feet—all that was like the hymn and banner of triumph to the disheartened and defeated.

“They’re gone,” she sighed; “and I’ve let ’em go.”

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That was a new turn to her thought, and she repeated it.

“I’ve let ’em go. I’ve sent ’em away. They might ha’ stayed, if I’d been willing. But I wasn’t. I wanted ’em to go, and they’ve gone. I did it.”

Her head sank on her breast; her courage was nearly at an end.

“I let ’em go,” she said again, “when I might ha’ kept ’em. It was what William left me, and I’ve driven ’em away.”

This was still a new turn to her thoughts.

“It was what William left me, and I wouldn’t take it. It was all I could do for him, and I wouldn’t do it. It was God’s mercy shown to me, and I wouldn’t accept it. When the father was taken from me, God gave me his child. I could ha’ had it at last. She’d begun to be softer to me. She’d changed. We’d all changed. If I’d been patienter and readier to wait it would ha’ come right, and I’d ha’ been able to protect ’em. Now, what ’ll become of ’em? Oh, what ’ll become of ’em? She ain’t able to bring him up. She ain’t able to take care of herself alone. Evil ’ull fall on ’em; and it ’ll be my fault. I’ve driven ’em out. I’ve a good home and every comfort for ’em, and it ’ud ha’ been my joy and pride to have cared for ’em both, and yet I sent ’em away. I’ve been false to William. God sent me his wrong to put right, and I wouldn’t put it.”

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The sun climbed higher up, the hours went by, and the day grew warm. Charity did not stir from her place at the door. Inside the cottage there was the work of the morning to be done, but for the first time in her life she refused it. Not even on the day when Jonas Boutilier had brought the tidings of William's falseness had she neglected that sacred household call; but now she was deaf to everything but the reproach of her own spirit.

"They've got no one but me, and I've failed 'em," she kept saying. "I've abandoned her as William did. I'll never forgive myself. I'll grieve for it all my life. If they go wrong the sin 'll be mine."

Suddenly she started up. Still another thought had come.

"Perhaps Jacob Eisenhauer 'll not be able to take 'em. Then they'll have to come back. Or perhaps he'll be late, and if I was to go after 'em I'd catch 'em before they sailed. They've got near four hours start o' me, and Hagar's a fast walker; but still I might overtake 'em."

She did not wait for further reflection. She did not consider what she should say or do if she found them. She did not stay to bring order to her house, or turn her key. She went as she was, leaving her door open behind her. She went as she was, with the morning breezes playing through her hair.

She took the path Hagar had taken, across the

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blueberry uplands, over the hill, then on to the road leading round the head of the cove to Mount Misery. The way was rough, but she did not mind it; the day was hot, but she did not heed it. She walked fast, with eagerness in her mild, gray eyes.

At noon she rounded the cove and came to the road leading back to the edge of the ocean.

“Hagar ’ll be nearing Mount Misery by now,” she said. “But Jacob Eisenhauer ain’t likely to sail before night. If he has two passengers he won’t be able to take her, and I’m pretty sure he’d have two.”

So she put heart into herself and went on. As she came down the east side of the cove she could make out the white houses of Fisher’s Grant nestling in their rocky cleft. Far above, a mere spot against the sky, or like a gull poised in the air, she could see her own home.

“It ought to be the home o’ William’s child—and it’s mother,” she said, and pressed forward.

It was the middle of the afternoon when she came where the road curved away from the cove and rose over the brow of the great headland the French Acadians had called Cap à l’Aigle. It was the first of the row that Charity could see from her own door, and at that distance bore a faint resemblance to an eagle’s head and beak thrust out into the ocean. But as the road mounted over it there was nothing to be seen but a bald, rocky crown. There was a little

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grass on it, just enough to give a tinge of verdure, and here and there a stunted bush.

“If I don’t hurry, I sha’n’t get there in time,” Charity said, anxiously.

As she neared the top of the cliff she scanned the whole sea, east and west. There was nothing in sight.

“Jacob’s gone by,” she thought. “He’ll have been earlier than I expected.”

Then she stopped, with a sudden, wild trembling of the heart.

Not far away, on the very summit of the cape, there sat a woman, with knees drawn up and face bowed on them, and hands clasped around them. She made a dark, curved line against the sky. Charity stood still.

“I can’t go—I can’t go,” Hagar was repeating to herself, in desperation. “I won’t go back; but I won’t go on. I don’t know what ’ll become o’ baby and me. Perhaps God in His pity ’ull take us.”

Her bundle and a packet of broken food were at her side. The bottle of milk stood near. Not far away, in the shadow of a solitary bush, the baby lay asleep. All around there was nothing but the barren rock. All before there was nothing but the empty sea. Above the cliff sea-gulls were circling with hoarse cries.

Charity crept nearer. It seemed as if her heart stopped beating.

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“Hagar,” she whispered, unable to find voice.

There was no response.

“Hagar,” she called, coming nearer still.

Hagar looked up, with big, terrible eyes. They seemed to Charity like eyes that had wept tears of blood.

The two women gazed at each other, neither moving.

“What have you come for?” Hagar asked, at last, without changing her attitude.

“I want you to come back,” Charity answered, remaining where she was.

“I won’t come,” was the reply, spoken doggedly.

“I want you to bring back the child.”

“I won’t bring him.”

“Oh, Hagar, have pity on me!” Charity cried, flinging herself down beside the other.

Hagar drew away.

“No, no, no,” she muttered; “you want the child, and I’ll not give him up. You don’t want me. If you’d ha’ wanted me, I should ha’ seen it.”

“I do want you, Hagar—I do—I do.”

“Only because I’m the mother o’ the child, and you can’t have him without me.”

“You’re wrong, Hagar—you’re wrong. I want you. You’re my friend and companion. The house was awful after you went. I couldn’t bear it. I had to come after you. You’re more to me than you know.

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You're more than I knew. You're more than any friend. You're more than any sister. I don't know what you are to me. We seem to've growed together. We seem like two people as God has given to each other, to love each other and comfort each other, because they've been through the same trials. I want you, Hagar; I want you to come back to me and live wi' me, and we'll bring up William's child together."

For a minute there was no answer; Hagar still gazed with bloodshot eyes. Then, with a quick, half-savage movement, she threw herself prone at Charity's feet.

"I'll go!" she cried, the words coming hardly. "I'll go back wi' you. You're a good woman. I'll be your servant. I'll never cross you no more. I'll just live to love you and do what you tell me. You've broke me down. I was bad, I was hard, I was cruel, but your goodness has broke me down."

Then she raised herself, kneeling upright, her arms outspread.

"I ain't his wife!" she cried, loudly. "I ain't his wife! No one ain't his wife but you!"

The sea-gulls swooped around; Charity gazed up in awe. Then Hagar leaped to her feet and snatched off her wedding-ring.

"Here, here!" she cried—"here, here! Let me put it on you! No one ain't his wife but you!"

She seized Charity's left hand and pressed the ring

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on her finger. Then, with a hasty movement, she drew a paper from her bosom.

"Them's my lines," she muttered, feverishly. "But I ain't his wife. There! There!"

As she spoke she tore her lines in two; she tore them again, and yet again, and still again. She tore them fiercely, eagerly, hurriedly. She tore them till there was nothing left to tear. Then, with a hoarse moan, like that of the hungry sea birds round her, she let the fragments go. Out they flew on the breeze like little living creatures, bright and dancing. The wind caught them and carried them up and down, swirling them round in tiny eddies, driving them apart, chasing them inland among the rocks or blowing them out to sea.

But Hagar had not yet done. With a long, swinging, Indian-like stride she went towards the baby, snatching him up.

"He ain't my child!" she cried. "He ain't my child! He's yours," and she almost threw him into Charity's arms. The child opened his eyes and smiled, cooing softly. "Him and me is yours," Hagar went on. "I'm your servant, and he's your child. William has given us to you."

"And me to you," said Charity. Then she rose and stood beside Hagar. "You've put your ring on my finger, Hagar. Let me put mine on yours."

She drew the black ribbon from her bosom, and de-

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tached the plain gold band. Before Hagar could protest it was on her finger.

“In the kingdom of heaven,” Charity murmured, as she and Hagar clung together, “there’s no more marriage, nor giving in marriage; but we’ll all be—you and me and William and the baby, and all of us—we’ll all be as the angels of God.”

“Take the baby,” Hagar whispered.

“No,” said Charity. “You take him. We’ll both take him. We’ll carry him home together.”

THE END



